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4 **Deaditorial** — Another month, another analysis of the industry by editor Dave Reader

6 **Tell The Difference** — We present, with pride, a disturbing tale of Midlands ennui by Joel Lane

12 **Luggage In The Crypt** — After last issue's analysis of the career of Steve Gallagher, Nick Vince poses the tough questions — what's death going to hold for Steve?

18 **Twin Titans Of Terror** — From the dimmest reaches of the horror film publicist's mind comes the entity we all love — the double bill. Mike Wathen recalls a few and wonders if nostalgia is as good as it used to be

22 **Bye-Bye** — Psychopaths, doncha hate 'em? They can be such a nuisance and so messy. Yet Caroline Dunford thinks they're misunderstood

28 **Portfolio** — He calls himself The Gurch. Frankly, with art this good, we just don't care what his name is

33 **Moving Out** — Masks and games lie at the heart of this thoughtful tale, told by rising horror star Nicholas Royle

36 **Cut Dead** — In the world of comics, the work of Jamie Delano has stood out recently as worthy of respect. Michael Bonner talks to the English comics writer taking the US by storm

42 **Jack In The Box** — Do you like stories with stings in the tale? Good, then Jason Olroyd's work has not been in vain

47 **Industrial Gothic** — Stephen Laws has been known as 'the quiet man of horror' — Brigid Cherry analyses the man behind the silences

54 **Last Writes** — Our Christmas greeting to all our readers, coloured blood red, thanks to Kerry Earl

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SUBSCRIPTIONS from Select Subscriptions Ltd, 5 River Park Estate, Billet Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 1HL. Tel: (0442) 876661.
12 issues UK £23.40, Europe £28.90, Middle East £29.30, Far East £31.90, Rest of World £30.90 (or $57.00 USA).
USA Subscription Agent: Wise Owl Worldwide Publications, 4314 West 238th Street, Torrance, CA 90505 USA.
BACK ISSUES for the last twelve months, subject to availability from: Select Subscriptions Ltd, 5 River Park Estate, Billet Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 1HL. Tel: (0442) 876661. To avoid disappointment check availability before placing your order. Each copy costs cover price plus 60p p&p.
BINDERS: £6.80 each (including p&p). Telephone your Access or Barclaycard order through on (0442) 66551.
DISTRIBUTION UK NEWSTRADE: SM Distribution Ltd, 6 Leigham Court Road, Streatham, London SW16 2PG. Tel: 081-677 8111, Telex: 261643.
OVERSEAS SALES, UK SPECIALIST RETAIL SALES AND ALL MAGAZINE AVAILABILITY ENQUIRIES: Copy Sales Co-Ordinator, Argus Specialist Publications — see address below — Tel: (0442) 66551.
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY: Garnet Print, Rotherham.
ORIGINATION BY: Project 3, Whitstable.

SKELETON CREW

Argus Specialist Publications, Argus House Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP2 7ST. Tel: (0442) 66551

ISSN No. 0959-8006

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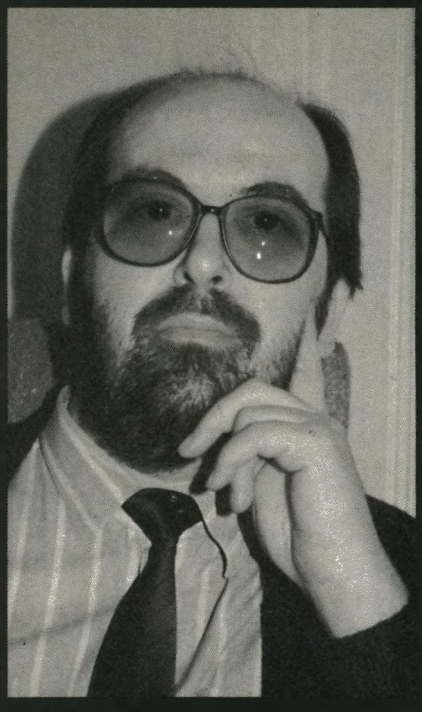
DEADITORIAL



There's a cyclical nature to the horror market that's engaging the attention of editor Dave Reeder this month. He would say 'the horror genre' but it seems the phrase sets some people's teeth on edge.

The horror market is cyclical, which strikes me as both exciting and depressing. Exciting? But, of course — the constant flood of new materials, the sympathetic repackaging of classic books and films, the obvious enthusiasm of publishers and film companies, the incredible feeling of release when we no longer have to explain why 'we like that ghoulish stuff', the self satisfaction when authors whose works you've enjoyed in secret are suddenly receiving major adulation, and so on.

Depressing? Sadly, yes — the cynical milking of our dreams and delights by faceless corporations, the relentless downgrading of creativity into 'product', the flood of cheap, imitative trash that stifles work of genuine merit, the shock when secret obsessions are suddenly laid bare for all to see and laugh at, and so on.

Is there any escape? Probably not. The wheel of karma seems to dictate that horror moves in these cycles — take any aspect of it and consider the problem. The Universal horror cycle descended into cheap laughs. AIP played out a formula but with ever-decreasing artistic integrity, Hammer got caught in the loop of television and cinema managing to deliver to each the worst aspects of the other, Troma began to believe its own hysterically inane publicity and so on.

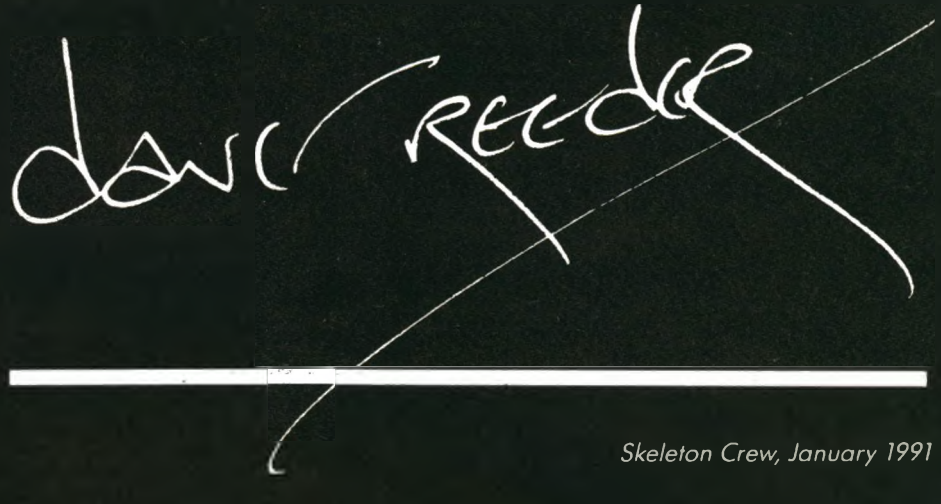
Or take books. We can all recite the high peaks of horror literature, but never seem too concerned that they remain just that — peaks. To anyone who enjoys a horror novel, but is not yet a fanatic, it must seem a weird chronology — who, after all, does come in between Shelley, Poe, Stokes, Lovecraft, Bloch, King and Herbert? Where are the others, the ones that put such writers into context; rather than the ones who feed off them like literary vampires?

Or even magazines? Even those of us with cavernous cellars under our houses with shelf upon shelf of treasured gems can never understand why horror film magazines flourished in the late 50s/early 60s, the early 70s, the early 80s and now. What happened to the missing years? What's happening now with a sudden flurry of horror, science fiction, gaming and comics magazines on the newstand?

And what about you? Do you welcome the opportunity to discover a world beyond your imaginings whenever you enter a bookshop or newsagent, or do you despair because you'll never be able to read it all even if you could afford to buy it in the first place. Take comics, I used to read loads of them at 20p or 50p; now, looking at excellent titles like PREDATOR costing over £7 an issue, I just can't justify it to myself. And, don't forget, I have the advantage of getting a lot of this stuff free as review copies.

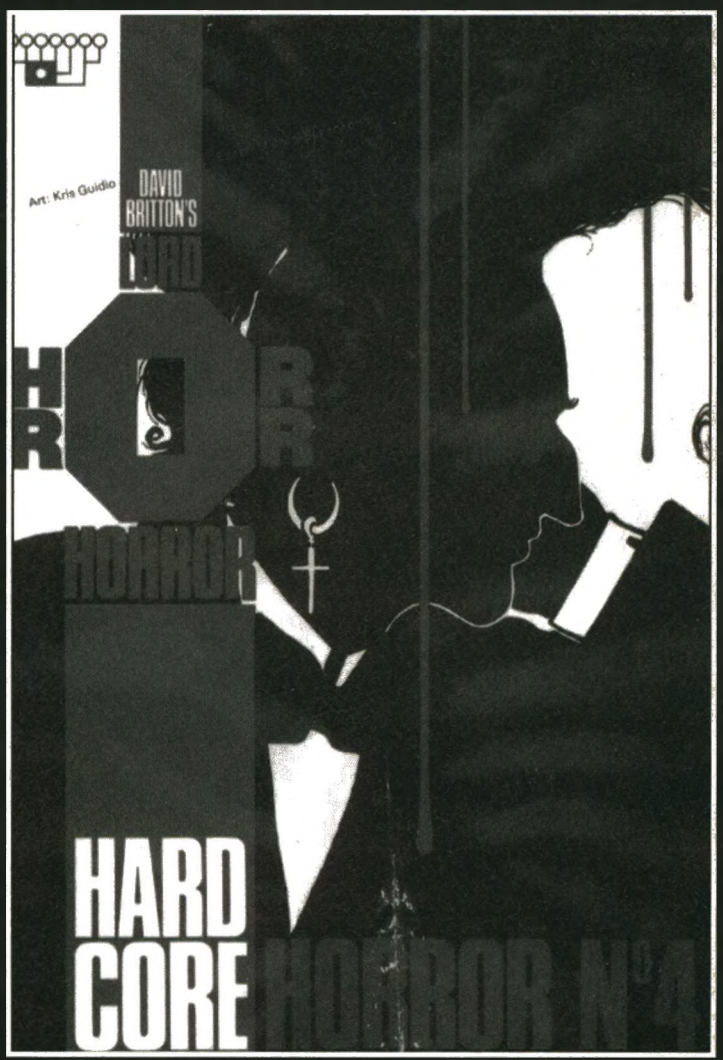
So what's the answer? I wish I knew. I'm enjoying the upswing now of a buoyant horror market, but experience suggests that it cannot last. Let's hear from you about it.

"We can all recite the high peaks of horror literature, but never seem too concerned that they remain just that — peaks. To anyone who enjoys a horror novel, but is not yet a fanatic, it must seem a weird chronology — who, after all, does come in between Shelley, Poe, Stokes, Lovecraft, Bloch, King and Herbert?"



HARD-CORE-HORROR

It's perhaps the forensic honesty qualifying the complex tapestry of love, epiphany, and final disillusionment that most potently disturbs. It's lightyears away from the kitsch allegory of Spiegelman's "Maus". Like Bergman's similarly harrowing "Cries and Whispers", Britton's close and unbearable scrutiny elevates the agony of Horror's passive participation in the Holocaust into a work of tremendous power. In "Hard-Core-Horror" there is an exacting cultural reclamation of theme and material previously considered intractable to creative expression.

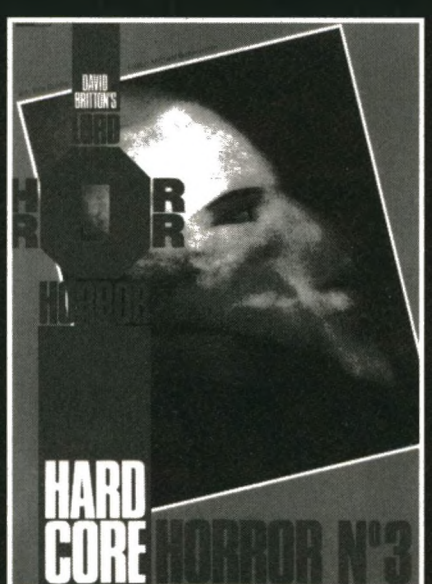


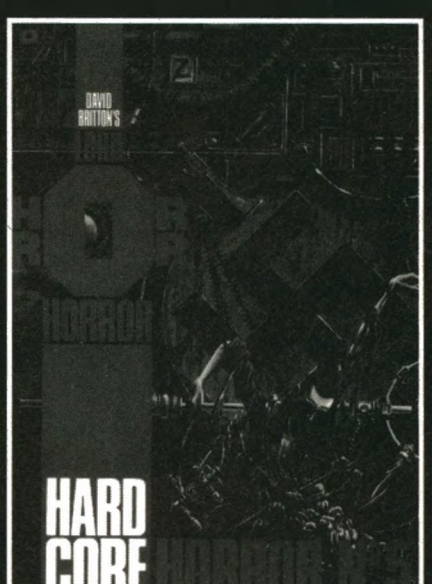
The "Hard-Core-Horror" series' total effect is one of some frenzied synthaesthesic assault; we're remorselessly drawn into the very fabric of Horror's psychescape. Britton simply doesn't permit his audience the cozy banality of the stylised quirkiness that's normally perceived as 'experimental' in comics. No anodyne serial killers here; Horror's prejudices are ugly and specific and won't succumb to corporate comicdom's distaste.

"Hard-Core-Horror"; quite simply, there really aren't any precedents.

Extraordinary.

Colin de Suinn
SPEAKEASY





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TELL THE DIFFERENCE

It had been a difficult weekend for Chris. She'd spent it alone, hoping that without the distraction of company she'd be able to think some things through. Spending every Saturday might with Jamie had become a ritual which she felt better for having broken. But it had been a restless night; and a long, dark morning of lucid misery, listening to the church bells repeating tunelessly across the road from the block of flats where she lived. There didn't seem anything that she could sort out; she'd wasted the day in writing a long and deliberate letter to an old schoolfriend, who was married now. In the evening her mood had shifted. She'd taken the bus into Birmingham and walked around the city centre for hours, feeling vaguely that someone she passed might be able to divert her thoughts. In the bus queue at midnight, she'd felt tempted to start talking to a complete stranger. Someone who didn't know her might help her to recognise what was changing in her. The fear of making trouble for herself had kept her quiet.

Chris expected Monday morning to restore normality; it usually did. Whenever she withdrew into herself like this it was the same disappointment: no light from the depths, just a chilly stasis that filtered through her and overcame the outside world. She needed company, if only to make her seem less alien to herself. At first, the bus to work only recalled the journey back to Longbridge the night before. It was an overcast November morning; the window was blurred by a gauze of rain. She'd gone upstairs to smoke, and the first inhalation seemed to jar her awake. It tasted peculiarly dry and bitter; she was still coughing when the trouble started.

The youth sitting in front had hair that stood nearly vertical and was dyed jet black, in contrast to his perfectly white skin. Two small headphones isolated him from the world. He swayed slowly from side to side, refusing to let even the bus's movement register in his private rhythm. With perfect clarity, Chris heard the music start to life inside her head. It was ragged and tense, a guitar fighting to assert itself against an electric pulse. A tall man, his eyes focused with rage, was rising to his feet in a crowded pub. As he leaned across the table towards her (him?), she realised how drunk he was. And then she was outside, exposed to the night as it pressed in with hard footsteps, trapping him under the bridge. Cars ground by in safe indifference. There was a dull blow at the back of his head, then a much worse one, the sensation delayed but gathering in force, at his mouth. He stared for moments at the fist held in mid-air, rings on three of the fingers, a vivid flower of blood over metal and flesh. It had happened too quickly and he had been too drunk to be afraid.

The image of the outsider on horror literature has been — to put it mildly — overworked. That's why, when an author makes it fresh again, we can talk of the birth of a major new talent. For Joel Lane, the moment of truth has come.

The music cut out abruptly as Chris opened her eyes. The youth had stopped swaying; and he was rigid and alert. But what had just happened? Chris realised that she had bitten through her cigarette. It could have been her tongue. The bone-deep pain and the frozen taste had faded so quickly that she closed her eyes again, needing to know what had become of them. But there were no more clues. The hallucination threw the rest of her day into sharp relief. She was almost glad of the distraction, as long as she didn't try to understand it. Late that night she realised how frightened she was. She rang Jamie, but gave up hope of trying to explain as soon as she spoke. It could wait until they were together; his voice sounded too uneasy to offer any positive reaction. It might be worse if he tried to be sympathetic.

The next incident came at midday on Wednesday. Chris had just sat down in the canteen, hardly noticing the middle-aged woman seated at the next table between her and the window. She had just started eating when her neck seized up; somewhere, a machine began to whine. There was a sharp chemical odour in the air. When she tried to back away from it, her muscles refused to function.The movement going on in her body was not her own. Enough sensation returned to her throat to make her aware of what was blocking it. She could only retreat towards darkness, into complete passivity, way from the knowledge that her stomach was being pumped. The disgust that went with knowing could not be realised; it was after the fact. Chris found herself staring in abject terror at her prawn salad. By a face-saving reflex, she swallowed a mouthful that, a moment before, had been massive and inorganic. When she looked up, the woman was staring into the

brightly lit space overhead. She was heavily built, and her dark hair made a V on her forehead, mirrored in the shape of her eyebrows. It was the kind of face, Chris thought, that could make another face if turned upside down.

After that, it happened a few times every day. Chris would catch sight of someone nearby, always a stranger, and then some kind of disturbing scene would snap into focus before fading after a few moments. The images always seemed to be of private suffering: illness, rejections, beatings. Not all were sudden or violent; there were glimpses of loneliness and confusion that were not bound to any particular event. Or there were events no more traumatic than being laughed at, or waking up next to someone unfamiliar. The empathy was so intense that Chris was bound to regard these moments as experiences from the actual lives of strangers. It took an extreme case to change her view: a young girl of normal appearance, but carrying the image of herself as deformed like a maggot with stick-limbs. There was something ludicrous as well as painful in the cringing figure, and its imitative gestures. After that, Chris was more aware of some unconvincing elements in the visions. They belonged to a particular type of suffering: they were people's images of damage done to themselves. From that, it was an easy step to what she had thought first of all: they were experiences which she made up herself. The others only performed them for her.

Chris found this suspicion about herself more disturbing than the thought that she might really be telepathic. It struck at her conscience in some way. There was no denying the compulsive inner release of compassion that the visions gave her. But before she could ever speak to one of the strangers, the sense of unreality cut her off. That was the real damage. She had never been much better than indifferent to the troubles of those closest to her. It was far easier to cry over a film or a song.

What was happening now was too much like what she had needed for months, perhaps years. And how was it going to help? She wanted to tell Jamie about it, but things were difficult enough between then already. They'd lived together for two years, until Chris had moved out to a little flat in another district. They still saw each other most weekends, but that was due more to force of habit than to anybody's plans. Increasingly she felt unable to get close to anyone. Sometimes she could talk to Jamie in bed, when her tension let up; and she could listen to him, too, which was becoming impossible for her on the telephone or in public.

Many things had gone wrong after Chris had lost the baby, about a year ago. She was unable to recall the exact date. After three months of pregnancy, she had miscarried almost without warning. She still felt as though some people at work suspected her of having an abortion. It didn't help that, at the time, she had experienced a secret sense of relief. But she knew that the loss still mattered; unlike the visions, it didn't throw up any larger-than-life images in front of her. She didn't remember any instant of those months clearly. But the whole memory was there, just under the surface of each day, hidden and complete.

Perhaps the visions were some vicarious way of recovering that time. They were rather like being in love — the compulsive way you felt about the world through another person's pain and pleasure. Love made you passive like that, reduced you to an eye or a fingertip. She could feel less for Jamie, these days, than she felt for the blurred form that sometimes cohered in her sleep, struggling towards her to be made whole and given a face. Though her pregnancy had been unplanned, they might have stayed together if they'd tried for another baby. The claustrophobia that had made her leave then seemed now to have closed around her.

The break with Jamie came in early December, when the dark and overcast weather was giving way to a lucid purity that promised snow. The sky was even blue that morning. Shopping, Chris noticed how slow and unsteady some of the older people seemed. It was a more subtle effect of the cold than the massed coughs and cracked lips of schoolchildren on the bus. A few winter images stamped themselves across the patient faces: black ice on crusted roads, snowballs bursting into white seeds; but already she was learning to blur them together, denying each stranger anything beyond an instant.

That evening, over dinner in Jamie's house, she told him that she had decided to spend Christmas with her parents. He didn't seem affronted, though she realised afterwards that it wouldn't have hurt her to invite Jamie to join them. Presumably he'd stayed here on his own; he never seemed to contact his family in Sheffield. Both encouraged and a little shamed by this easy change of plan, Chris started trying to describe the things that had been happening to her. Jamie listened patiently, a studious expression on his rather boyish face. He was a year younger than her, but had the benefit of a university education which, somehow he had yet to develop beyond. Her account of the visions seemed to go on for far too long, and trailed off into embarrassment: "It's a kind of hallucination, obviously. But I can't see where it all leads. Or what it means."

Jamie nodded and swallowed the last of his meal. "Perhaps first you should ask

"On impulse, she tapped his pale forehead. It made a hollow sound which the room echoed unexpectedly. His eyes opened, but they were not awake; they were so dark that she thought the sockets were empty. It occurred to her that she was meant to fit the bodies inside each other, like Russian dolls."

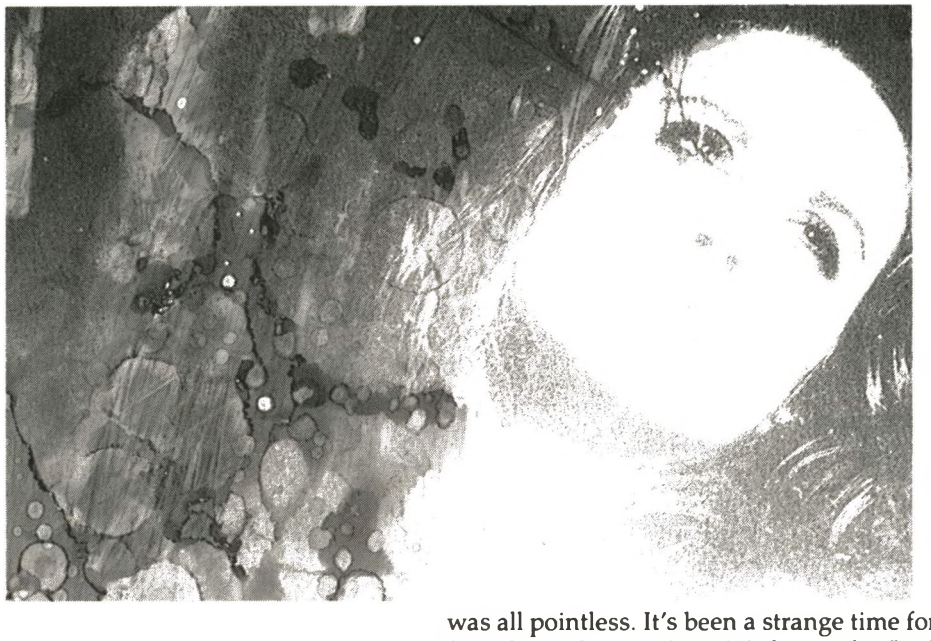
what brought it on. I don't suppose you've talked to a doctor?" Chris shook her head; there hasn't seemed any point. "It sounds a bit like the mental equivalent of spots before the eyes," he said. "Now that you're spending so much time on your own, you wind yourself up a bit too easily." He paused and caught her eye. "I've noticed that you're hardly your usual self these days."

Chris was already beginning to feel that it had been a mistake to raise the subject. A little bar of tension was starting to press into her forehead. There was something contrived to his rationality, as though he were using it to disguise something else. "That's not really — " she tried. "No, it's all been too much as usual since last winter. Still under the snow, asleep. Now there's an alarm bell. I can see things dying and coming to life." Jamie blinked; his fists clenched on the table surface. There was an uneasy silence.

"You're not trying to make sense," he said quietly, and Chris was struck by how tense he had become. "What do you want me to do? You're getting caught up in one of your own little dramas again. You lock out the real world and then expect it to come and rescue you." She couldn't see what he was hitting out at; it made her feel like a victim. Their old arguments were taking over in ways that neither of them could deal with. She was about to try and defuse the situation when he carried on: "If you want to go your own way, that's fine. But I'll warn you now, if you go off the rails don't start telling everyone how strange and tragic it all is. They won't listen to it, you know?"

Chris stared at him. "You're the one who's acting. I didn't expect some shitty lecture from you." The more North his accent got, the more South hers turned. The bar of stress was making her neck tremble now. "I really thought you were listening . . . You won't let me change at all. In case I outgrow my 'usual self'." Outgrow you, was what she meant.

"Well, you weren't very normal to begin with, I suppose," Jamie said with a mixture of triumph and panic. It was suddenly clear how he had managed the whole conversation so as to pay her back for leaving him. Chris stood up, gathering the plates together and muttering something about the washing-up. As soon as she was out of his sight, she put everything down on the nearest flat surface. Her hands were shaking too much to carry, or even touch, anything. Without looking back into the dining-room, she walked into the hall and picked up her coat; then she dropped it, went on into the living-room and sat down. The room still looked as she had redecorated it on moving in, more than two years before.



It was half and hour before Jamie came in. She hadn't moved in that time. He put a cup of coffee in front of her. She let it get cold while he sat opposite, watching her. "Are you all right?" he said at last. "Oh look, I'm sorry. That was all pointless. It's been a strange time for me too, you know?" Chris nodded and forced a smile. It took a while longer for the feeling of horror to leave her, but when it had passed and she felt able to move and breathe again, he was still there. "We can talk in the morning," he said. "If you want to stay, that is. Would you rather go?" She shook her head.

In bed, he was hesitant; but she encouraged him to make love, knowing she'd be unable to sleep otherwise. As often happened, stress gave both of them a heightened intensity of release. Chris felt a brief sense of reversal, of Jamie's becoming helpless and dependent in the final moments, and clinging to her as if only she could keep him alive. Afterwards, he seemed drained of energy. His body curled up, still facing her; his eyes were already closed. She stroked his forehead, struck by how boyish and vulnerable he appeared in the half-light, with all the tension melted from his face. His neck and shoulders were flushed red. Her feeling of tenderness struggled with its opposite, the impulse to break away. She leaned over him to switch off the bedside lamp.

It was still dark a few hours later, when Chris switched the lamp back on. Taking care not to wake Jamie, she dressed. Normally it took her about an hour to coordinate herself on Sunday morning; but the night made her unexpectedly quick and alert. She wrote Jamie a short note and left it by the lamp, which she switched off. It took her more than an hour to walk home; in the thin light of the streetlamps the roads were

easily confused, and she made several wrong turnings. When she reached home, daylight was filtering through weakly overhead. She had to rub her hands and blow on the fingers before she was able to use her front-door key.

The weeks that followed were a blur of pain and confusion. Going to stay with her parents made Chris feel that the past few years had simply been cut out of her life, meaningless and vital like a diseased organ. Time itself was material. Its grains lodged in her eyes and the crevices of her skin. She found herself angrily examining the mirror each morning for new signs of maturity. As a child she had liked watching the Victorian hourglass that her mother had inherited. It was filled with a dark-grey sand, almost too fine for the tiny thread to be visible as it worked through the neck, linking the hollow above to the mound below. Now she was the hourglass. It was a relief to get away from her parents, the house and town that still kept her childhood imprisoned. At least in the city most of the faces were reassuringly young and unfamiliar.

There seemed little point in talking to anyone about it all. When she tried, something caught in her words, making them flat and hardly recognisable. In time, the expression "Oh, I'm fine" became a habit that was too painful to break. And in fact, whatever was wrong hardly seemed to be wrong with *her*. The things she felt and imagined all happened somewhere outside her control. Early in the new year,m as a little more light and movement filled out the days, Chris began to tell herself that she was recovering. But perhaps it was more a matter of having become used to the ways she had changed. Losing touch with Jamie helped her not to remember.

The visions shrank, in turn. Her own illness already took too much out of her. Half by effort, half automatically, she became able to screen out the individuality of any stranger. Their cries in her mind ran together and cancelled out, until she could no longer tell the difference between them. There was only a single pulse, no more disturbing than the breath of a sleeping infant. When she looked at certain strangers, it was with another kind of curiosity: the tension that sometimes caught her breath at the sight of an attractive man was more like rage than affection. She wanted to hold an unblemished, unnamed body, without so much as a birthmark.

A residue of inhibition, as well as the knowledge that she would be disappointed, held her back until the sense of need had become absolute. Chris realised that the feeling of anger came from a need to break with her old domestic self. It was a matter of killing Jamie, so to speak, before she was forced to go back to him; no man was going to take her independence away now. But to be with someone for a night would give her a breathing space. Afterwards, it would be easy to cut herself off again.

It was still winter when Chris met a short, heavy-set man in a nightclub in the city centre. His hair was darkish and cropped close to his head. His eyes were still darker; and the uneasy way they moved around gave away his nervousness. As they talked, she watched his fingers opening and closing over his glass; they were pink and stubby, with nearly circular nails. Like everything else about him, his conversation was functional and cut short. Her clairvoyance, or whatever it was, echoed back from him as though he were a blank wall. His name was Robin; he was unemployed; he lived a few minutes' walk from the city centre. After four or five drinks, Chris found herself agreeing to go back with him. His younger brother would be at home, he said, but would be asleep by now.

Outside, the streets were still full of people, many of them dressed inadequately to face the cold. Robin walked silently on a route that led away from the late-night crowd, the clubs and bars, to where there was less light and movement. Parked cars were massed between concrete walls; drunks and vagrants were slumped on dim benches. Chris was glad of her partner's company, though he seemed to take little notice of her; talk had apparently served its purpose for him. In bus shelters and subways, young couples were pressed together, immobile. Kissing might be the only way they could keep their mouths from seizing up with cold. The two walked on, not touching, into the real night. Gaps between houses were filled with wasteland; a few thin trees, metallic with front, held onto the sky. The look of dereliction owed something to the lamplight, which stretched the same off-white skin over everything. They still hadn't spoken when Robin stopped in front of a tower block similar to the one in which Chris lived.

His flat wa on the fourth floor. It was whitewashed and sparse, with a few cheap film posters sellotaped to the walls. Robin was apparently able to keep the place severely clean, but not to make it comfortable. At least he didn't mind her smoking. (Jamie always had). He made coffee, the cheapest kind, while Chris examined the

"In bus shelters and subways, young couples were pressed together, immobile. Kissing might be the only way they could keep their mouths from seizing up with cold. The two walked on, not touching, into the real night. Gaps between houses were filled with wasteland; a few thin trees, metallic with front, held onto the sky."

"After that, it happened a few times every day. Chris would catch sight of someone nearby, always a stranger, and then some kind of disturbing scene would snap into focus before fading after a few moments. The images always seemed to be of private suffering: illness, rejections, beatings."

unfinished jigsaw on the kitchen table. It would become the figure of a naked woman, half crouched, her arms wrapped across her thin torso. The face was still absent; it was evidently not a priority. The posture looked too defensive to belong to a soft-porn image. "My brother's," Robin said with a shrug. He watched her uneasily, as though wondering how to negotiate the gap between them.

He didn't touch her until they were in his cramped bedroom. The bed was tiny; Chris doubted that they would both be able to sleep in it. The light bulb was red, which made the bare walls seem less close, the angles softer. It also made Robin's body appear childlike, though it felt as tense as something run on electricity. Chris felt detached, a witness to a scene of her own invention. Time had slowed down. The shadow of their standing bodies was blurred on the near wall, too great for the room.

The sheets felt liked packed snow. Robin's body gave off little warmth; his skin was dry and still impossibly taut. Chris knew he wouldn't relax until it was over. She wondered whether, and in what way, she would be able to respond. For a long time Robin perched over her, his eyes shut, breathing steadily; his automatic movements communicated no feeling. He seemed unaware of anything outside himself. Unexpectedly, he drew away and slipped to one side, facing the wall. Could he have come without making any sound? When she touched his back, he doubled up and started to twitch violently. His hands gripped the pillow and pressed it into his face; his knees were drawn up close to his chest.

Then he was still. Chris wondered if he had had some kind of fit. The thought of how suddenly he had become uncoordinated ached in her mind like some old and terrible memory. Perhaps she should call an ambulance; but she couldn't remember having seen a telephone in the flat. Then she remembered his brother. He might know what was the matter. She dressed hastily. Robin was still clenched on the bed, immobile. He was hardly breathing. She thought of pulling the sheet and blanket up over him; but she was afraid to let anything touch him.

There was no telephone in the hall. The door next to the kitchen was only a bathroom, the windows literally frosted, dazzling with trapped light. She turned back and opened another door, feeling for the light-switch. The room filled up with red like a sudden bruise. It was the bedroom she had just left. But when she put the light out? the naked figure curled passively on the bed looked smaller, and younger. It must be the brother. Retreating, she knocked on the door. There was no response.

"There was a dull blow at the back of his head, then a much worse one, the sensation delayed but gathering in force, at his mouth. He stared for moments at the fist held in mid-air, rings on three of the fingers, a vivid flower of blood over metal and flesh. It had happened too quickly and he had been too drunk to be afraid."

Chris felt a rush of vertigo. She must be more drunk than she felt. Of course that had been Robin. She tried the door opposite. It was the same tiny room as before, already lit in dull red. The still figure on the bed was only three feet tall. It showed no signs of being alive. She reached down and brushed its tense shoulder with her fingertips; the skin was cold and dry over the knotted muscles. When she tugged the pillow out of his hands, the head lifted slightly on its rigid neck. On impulse, she tapped his pale forehead. It made a hollow sound which the room echoed unexpectedly. His eyes opened, but they were not awake; they were so dark that she thought the sockets were empty. It occurred to her that she was meant to fit the bodies inside each other, like Russian dolls. Her hands were shaking as she put her coat on; it was a struggle to get her arms through the sleeves. All at once she felt hopelessly tired.

Outside, the chill had lost its edge. Snowflakes were dropping out of a starless sky, only becoming visible inches from her face. They were as large and light as ashes from burning newspaper. Where they brushed her face and stuck there, she could feel them long after she knew they had melted. Though the streets were nearly deserted, Chris felt less afraid than she had on the way out. She found her way back to the city centre and the queue for the nigh bus without a mistake. There was no longer anything in her that resisted the cold, or the darkness. It was a great relief to let the thing in herself that had cried out in pain at being diminished flake away now and dissolve entirely. With each new breath she became more like the night, universal and indifferent.

Just before the bus shelter, she passed a shop window already scarred with white flakes. Behind the glass, the dummies held awkward postures, waiting to be dressed. They were bald and naked. Chris walked on before she could compare the figures with what the lamplight had shown her: her own thin reflection, whose staring eyes held a greater darkness then they could see.

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THE LUGGAGE IN THE CRYPT

You *can* take it with you. Well, so the Ancient Egyptians believed. 'It' of course was everything. Clothes, food, jewellery, furniture and if you were a member of the royal family: thrones, chariots, slaves. It was assumed that you needed in death, what you needed in life. What then did you choose? Which food, which favourite chariot etc? What items mean so much to you in this world, you'd just have to have them in the next? Nicholas Vince poses the questions to Steve Gallagher.

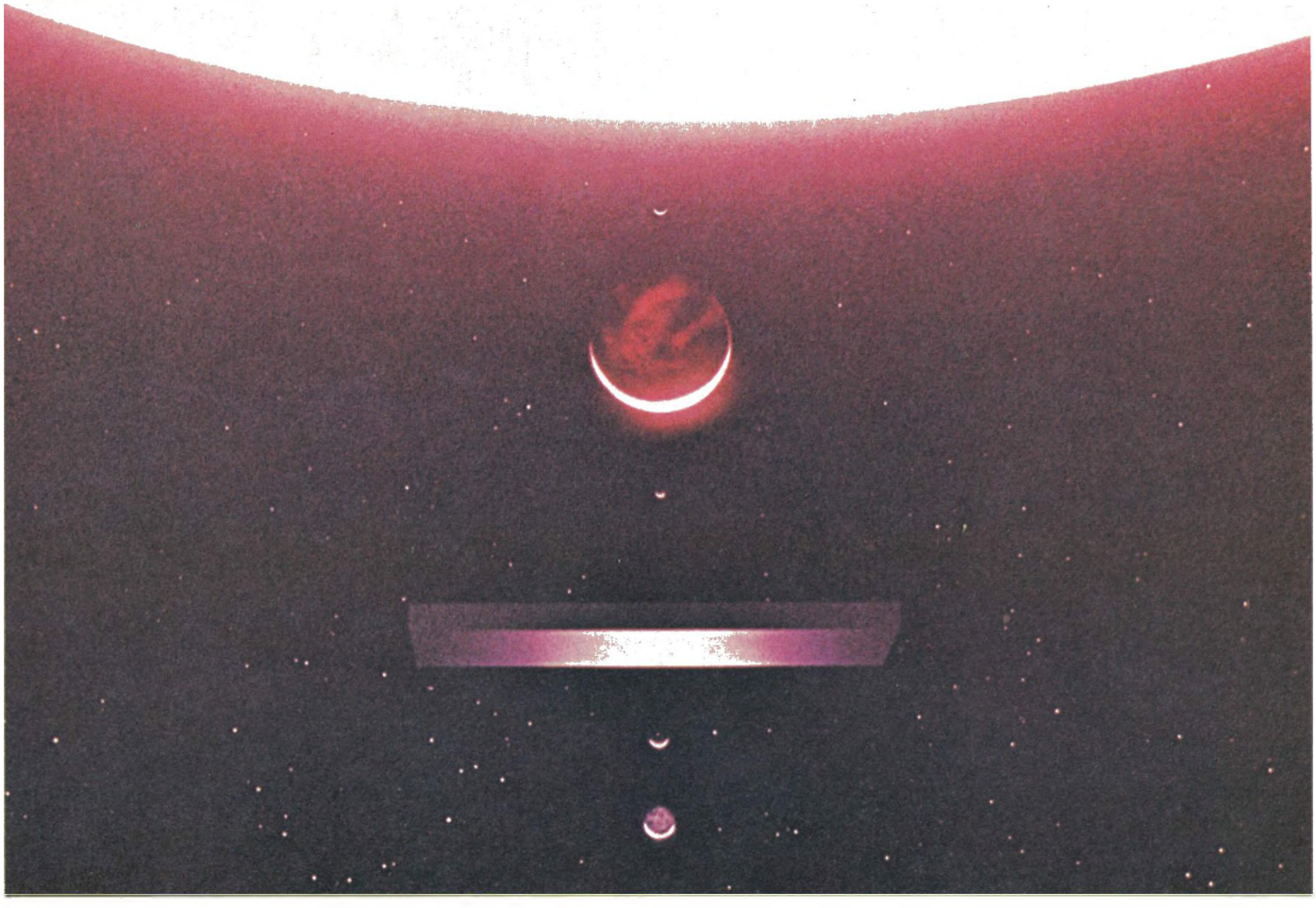
NV: For this interview I've imposed a view of The Afterlife that is Egyptian. What's your personal view?

SG: I'll tell you what I'd actually like to be true, which is the notion that in the immediate Afterlife you retain your personal identity for a while. But you have a period in which you realise that the shock of losing your physical identity maybe isn't so bad after all. And then you eventually merge into a large Collective Conscious and are happy to do it, and don't do it until you accept it. Now whether this has got any basis in fact, or whether it's sheer wishful thinking . . . I suspect it's sheer wishful thinking.

What I like to do is to watch SONGS OF PRAISE on a Sunday and see all these earnest, weary people singing about Eternal Joy in the same dreary voices. Imagine the surprise on their faces, when they get to the other side and look into the void and say — "Where's God then? 'E was supposed to be here . . . "

NV: "Where *is* St Peter with the keys."

SG: Well, absolutely. I probably do believe that there is a God. But the one thing I do not believe in is the Church. I think the Church is an entirely man-made organi-



sation, based around a set of metaphors constructed entirely for a social overclass to exert control over a social underclass. The notions of Heaven and Hell, if you trace them right down to the metaphorical roots, I think are powerful, mythic, telling evidence of the existence of a human soul. But, what we have in so much of organised religion is just this notion of the symbols as facts. In the Middle Ages it was far more concrete even than it is now . . . at least these day's we've got a certain element of doubt even in the minds of the most pious. So many people swallow wholesale the notion of Heaven and Hell, and think that if God is alive therefore he has a physical shape and **is** somewhere. My notion of God is that it's just the name we stick on the feeling that we have when we realise that everything in the world is vastly and wonderfully interconnected. And that our reality is not just a lot of matter interacting with itself, but that there is a kind of golden glow that surrounds the movement of everything in the Universe . . . and I'm going to stop now because I'm beginning to sound ready for the lock up: "**There is a God and he sends me messages in bus time tables.**"

NV: That sounds reasonable to me, so let's move on to what music you'd want to take with you.

SG: I would like to take the master tapes of HONEY by Bobby Goldsborough. I wouldn't play them, but by taking them with me I would deprive the rest of the world of them and I think that would be such an act of charity. On a serious . . . no, equally seriously, I would take Mahler's FOURTH SYMPHONY. Which is not necessarily the best of the Mahler symphonies. If you're going to be sitting around in a crypt, then I suppose the one to cheer you up would be Mahler's RESURRECTION SYMPHONY, but the FOURTH is the one I find I can always go back to. When I was in University I used to have a friend, Howard Skerry, and he was the first person I had ever met whose hobby was listening to music. He was the guy who said to me: "You really must listen to some Mahler." Before that I'd just about heard of Mozart and I could whistle the opening bars of Beethoven's FIFTH, and that was my entire classical repertoire. He said, "Listen to the FOURTH SYMPHONY and listen to the FIRST SYMPHONY, and if you can get your mind round those two — then the world of classical music will open up to you." And OK, so I'm not likely to appear as a contestant on 'My Music' next week, but I found it was absolutely true and Mahler's FOURTH was the gateway. I mean it wasn't whistleable tunes, it wasn't a pop thing that's ever going to turn up in a commercial. (Although now I think about it; part of it has turned up in a Duckham's Oil commercial, which I think is terrible. I hate those LP collections of themes from the ads. ALSO SPRACHT ZARATHUSTRA (Richard Strauss) becomes 'The Theme from 2001' and the Khatchaturian thing (Adagio from SPARTACUS becomes the 'Theme from THE ONEDIN LINE'. And of course, you're now getting it with opera as well. I hate *that*, because I can never divest the music of the cheap associations that have been put upon it.) But with the FOURTH I find I can always go back to it, and I rather have the feeling that if I have the FOURTH then I wouldn't be needing anything else — because I wouldn't be playing the Goldsborough anyway.

"What I like to do is to watch SONGS OF PRAISE on a Sunday and see all these earnest, weary people singing about Eternal Joy in the same dreary voices."

NV: Would you take fiction or non-fiction books?

SG: There are two books I would take — one of fiction, one of non-fiction. The fiction would be E. V. Rieu's Penguin translation of THE ODYSSEY (by Homer), which I read when I was about twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I kind of feel that everything that a writer would ever need to express is in that book somewhere. It's got a wonderful hero: who stands up as an individual against the gods, has an individual persona, goes through some of the most incredible adventures, which as they accumulate add more and more meaning and layers to the story. And it has the most incredible slam bang ending in the duel involving Odyseus and his son Telemachus, and the suitors who are occupying his palace. And I love the scene with the dog when he gets home. The old dog Argus, who is the only one who recognises his master and beats his tail and dies. I always get a lump in the throat at that bit. I just think it is *the* most wonderful book ever written, and like with the Mahler: if you've got that book, then you almost don't need anything else.

And the non-fiction I would take is THE PARADE'S GONE BY by Kevin Brownlow. Which is actually a huge, mega-thick book. Well, OK in the context of Eternity a mega-thick book is neither here nor there, but it's a collection of interviews with old people who were practitioners, technicians and performers in the days of silent movies. And it is the most evocative book of an era, and an art

"I would like to take the master tapes of HONEY by Bobby Goldsborough. I wouldn't play them, but by taking them with me I would deprive the rest of the world of them and I think that would be such an act of charity."

form, and a set of personalities. And it has the most kind of minor key feel about it of: "Here was a beautiful time and it is now gone." And of course in the After Life you're looking back and every time which has some element of beauty in it has now gone and stands as a memory. As an echo of a lost era, I think is one of the best expressions I've ever read.

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08.38
...THEN THE ANTI-RABIES AND OTHER SHOTS OVER AT MEDICAL AND A QUICK SCAN THROUGH THE TREATY BEFORE LEAVING FOR ST PETERSBURG...
08.40
AND SOON AFTER THAT... LONDON AND KING CHARLES... AND THE PRINCESS ROYALE AGAIN...
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NV: Plays that you'd like to see performed?

SG: What I'd like to take is DR FAUSTUS, and I'd like to stay in the bar while it's on.

NV: This is Marlowe's DR FAUSTUS, is it?

SG: Yes.

NV: Any particular reason why you'd like to be in the bar?

SG: I think it's a great play, but I am fairly familiar with it. I'd like to know that it's there, but I don't necessarily want to feel pushed into seeing it over and over again.

NV: Is there anything you feel you *could* sit through? If only just to nip in and out for the good bits.

SG: No. Really. I was a drama student at one stage and the interesting thing about being a drama student for me is that it taught me that I couldn't act and actually, I didn't really love the theatre. I love books and I love the cinema. I respect the theatre from a distance, but I don't love it.

NV: I know exactly what you mean. Comics?

SG: I'd take THE ADVENTURES OF LUTHER ARKWRIGHT, partly because my mate Bryan Talbot created it, and it was a ground breaking thing for British comics. And also because it is a bloody good read and there are so many complex lines running through it and if I had all that time to sit there and study it, I might eventually get my mind around it.

NV: I too love that comic — it's the only comic I've waited six years just to see how it ended.

SG: It's so gratifying to see how people are prepared to do that, and that it continues to have a life in so many other forms. Because, what you worry about, especially if you're a writer of books, is that if the book comes out and it flops then there are no second chances. In my career I've found out that isn't actually the case. There *are* second chances — CHIMERA's being re-published this year, which is like an eleven year old book which sold 65,000 copies and then disappeared from the face of the Earth, as I saw it. But it's had another life in radio, it's having another life in on TV and because of that it's coming back into print and it's getting an even wider audience than it ever had.

But, at the time, I thought well, that's it, two years out of your life — you put your biggest effort in, it's around in all the key branches of W H Smith for a couple of weeks and then it vanishes — is it really worth it? And with ARKWRIGHT it was published in its original form, and then it was re-published for the British market and it's now being re-packaged for the American market. And Simon Moorhead, who is the guy who originally picked up on the idea of CHIMERA, is now talking to Bryan about developing it as either a movie or a TV project.

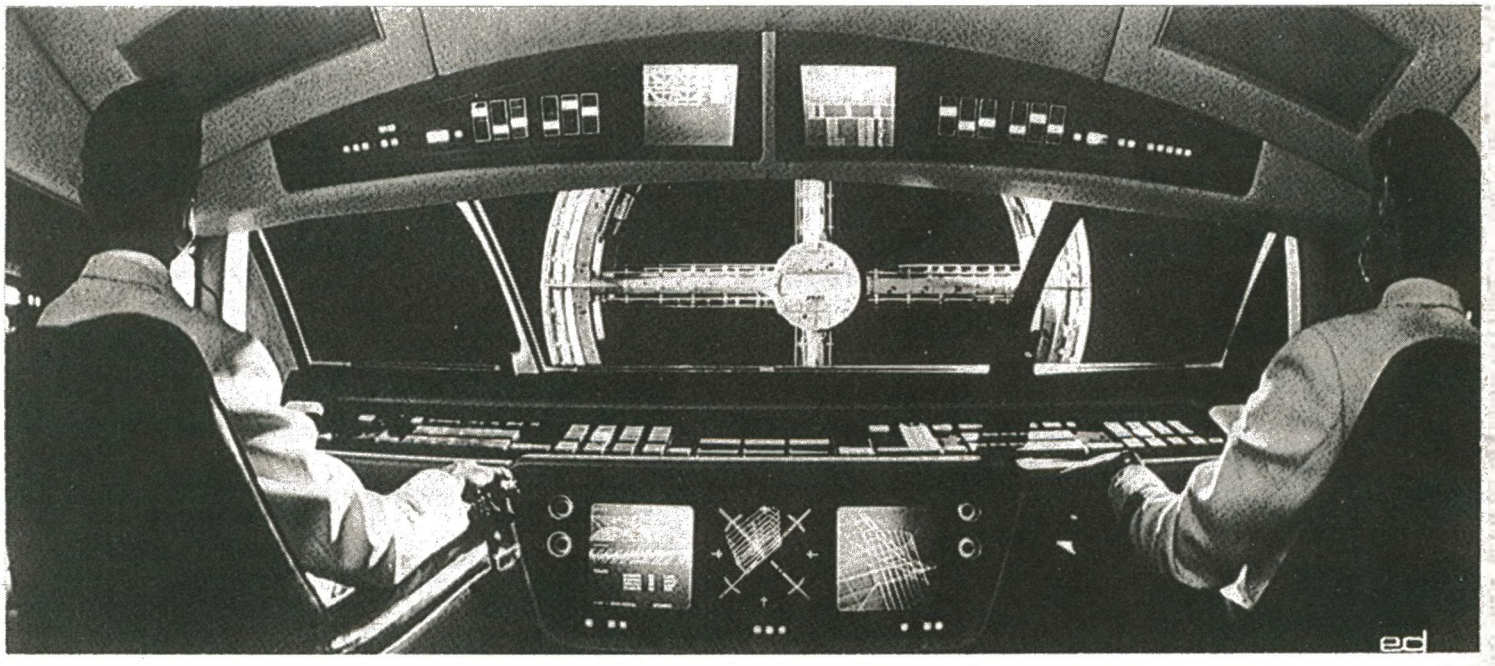
NV: I'd like to see the effects for that — as they include floating palaces and so on. Which brings us nicely on to your choice of films or videos.

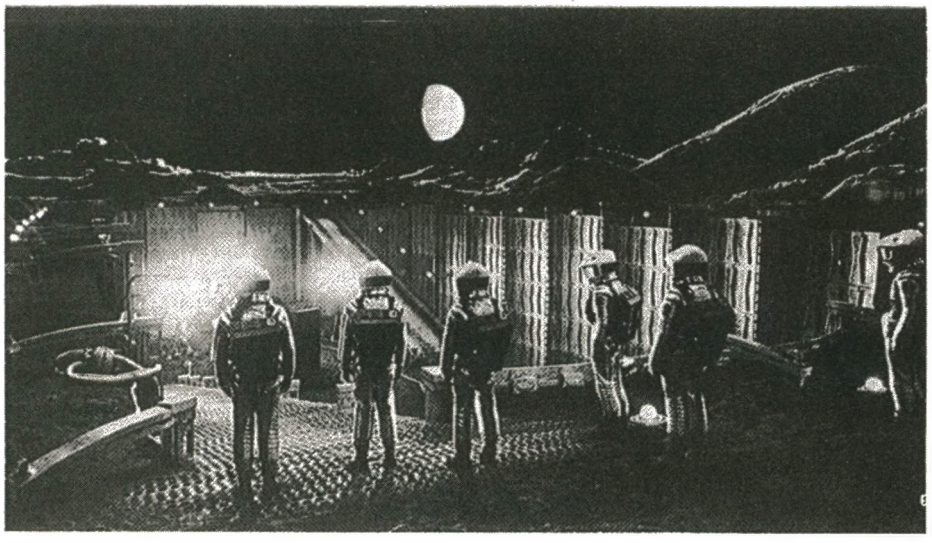
SG: I suppose it would have to be 2001 (directed by Stanley Kubrick — 1968 — from the book by Arthur C Clarke) which is the one movie I can always go back to again and again. Whenever it's on TV, I always say: 'Well I know this too well, I don't need to watch it.' But somehow, I always end up zapping through the channels to it and I'm always there to the end. I think it's a movie in which you can read so much of yourself. At the time people criticised it for its lack of action and its lack of incident — you know: "What the hell is it all about?" I never found

that at all, I always thought it was maybe the kind of screen you project your own soul on to and see it reflected back at you. For a big budget, big studio movie to do something like that . . . I mean, you could never say something like that of TOTAL RECALL, you could never say that about BLADE RUNNER, you could never even say that about any of Ingmar Bergman's films — where you don't see your own soul reflected back at you, you see *his*. Which, I don't want to say is less interesting because that sounds awfully self obsessed, but once it's up on the screen then it's unchangeable. Where as if you se your *own* soul up on the screen, then the vision *is* changeable. The movie you see at age fifteen is a different movie, substantially, to the movie you see at age twenty five and the one you see at age thirty five.

And it would be nice to take some (Andrei) Tarkovsky as well. Tarkovsky is one of those film makers whose movies always make me feel more intelligent than I actually am . . . and less intelligent than I feel I ought to be.

"But, at the time, I thought well, that's it, two years out of your life — you put your biggest effort in, it's around in all the key branches of W H Smith for a couple of weeks and then it vanishes — is it really worth it?"





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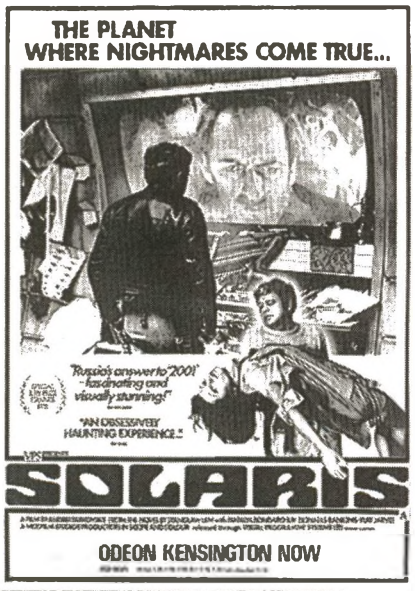
NV: If I was to pin you down to one title, which would it be.

SG: I love SOLARIS (1971), I think it has the most wonderful ending. But I know it was the movie that Tarkovsky rated *least* of all his own. If not Solaris, then ANDRE RUBLEV, (1965) which I saw at a very impressionable age. It has a complete central sequence that appears at first to be irrelevant to the main story; which is an account of a medieval monk and icon painter, and his spiritual development through some very very hard, brutal times. And half way through it cuts to this story of a town that needs a bell. Their bell caster has died, but his twelve year old assistant says that the bell caster has imparted his knowledge to him, and then if the town will only listen to him, then he'll do the job for them. And he becomes a driven obsessed, twelve year old tyrant, I mean like the Michael Cimino of the bell casting world, marshalling all the resources of the



town, bankrupting them, getting all the work force mobilised, taking over the entire landscape to build this huge mountain of the mold of the bell, and then getting the casting done. And then at the end it comes out and it's a perfect bell and everyone is overjoyed and bears it off like some huge trophy — and the boy's left in tears in the mud. Tears streaming down his face, and Rublev the monk comes up to him and puts an arm around his shoulder. At which point the boy confesses he hadn't got much of a clue how the bell should have been cast, he was doing it entirely on bull shit and nerve. And the longer I go through life, the more I realise that every major achievement has the same kind of story behind it. You have a figure at the head of it all to whom everybody looks, and they say OK, we are part of this scheme, but we can have faith in our part of this scheme because the Captain of the Ship knows where we are going. But the Captain of the Ship understands that he doesn't have a clue, and that he's doing it entirely on intuition. He's manipulating everybody around him, and he's dragging them with him simply be force of will. I'm sure that this is true of any endeavour, certainly of any artistic endeavour worth doing. And at that point the place of the whole subtale with in the movie becomes apparent and I find that hugely affecting. I see it even more as time goes by. You don't come in meekly, and you don't say for example: "Well, you know I'd quite like to do this movie, and if you'll trust me to direct it and if you surround me with all the right people then I'm sure I'd do a good job." What you do is, you come in full of bull shit and you say: "Right, this is the camera man I want, this is the editor I want, I'll do it for you for one and half million on 35 mm or one and a quarter million on 16 mm but it won't look as good and I think you should go the extra." And the truth is: you don't know, you haven't really got a clue, but you do know you are going to adjust your plans further down the line anyway, and all you need is to win people over at that particular moment. And if at the end of the day, that whole process comes up with something that everybody can be proud of then, the thing justifies itself. And even if it doesn't, then it still puts your price up for the next project.

NV: I like that. I like that idea a great deal. Now, what paintings would you take? You can raid any gallery you like.

SG: I do have certain favourite paintings. There's a painting in Ferens Art Gallery in Hull, called ALEXANDER SLAYING CLEITUS, which I always go back to. And I don't know why I go back to it, I don't know why I like it. It's not a particularly distinguished painting, the figures aren't particularly well painted. There is a really nice sense of light and space about it. It's one of those, I don't know how old it is, seventeenth, eighteenth century paintings, where the guy would spend a lot of time doing the arches, but have one kind of lighting effect on one side of it and another kind of lighting effect on the other. I'm just drawn back to it.

NV: Who's the artist?

SG: I don't remember his name. I did know it one time, but to my discredit, it's slipped my mind. No doubt I'm going to meet him on the other side and he's going to be really pissed off that Id didn't remember his name.

NV: Any others, a statue or something?

SG: When Marilyn and I got married we didn't have a lot of money, and we came down to London for a short stay that passed as a honeymoon. While we were down here, what little money we had we blew on a head from the British Museum. It was a replica of a bronze of the head of a poet Sophocles. I'd like the original of that, simply because I look at it and it's a guy in his late sixties, early seventies, with a beard and a headband holding the hair — a classic Greek bronze — and I look at that and I think: here is a guy who has grown more dignified as he has grown older. And I look at that and think, well old age need not be simply just a process of decay, it can also be process of maturation and I find that sort of life-enhancing to contemplate. Yeah, I'd have that.

NV: What costume would you like to be buried in?

SG: I would like a sweatshirt and a pair of jeans and a pair of trainers.

NV: Just a plain sweat shirt.

SG: Well, yes because I'm sure if I had a logo on it, I'd get fairly sick of it after a while.

NV: Any particular colour.

SG: Red.

NV: Bright red?

SG: Yeah, why not, make me easier to find in the Afterlife.

NV: An item of furniture.

SG: I suppose a chair. No, a three seater settee. Simply because, I've always wanted the Sunday Correspondent to send me their questionnaire, because they have a question in there: "On which occasions do you lie?" And I've always wanted to answer "Whenever in the proximity of a three seater settee." The three seater

settee is the world's most perfect design for reading on. As long as no-one else is sitting on it at the same time and you can get your feet up there.

NV: Any particular covering?

SG: Something with Scotchguard so it doesn't matter if I spill the tea on it, which I'm going to take as my favourite food.

NV: Any particular sort of tea?

SG: Yeah, I'm a bit of a tea freak. And I must qualify this by saying that if you set me up at a tea tasting, I would be useless. I wouldn't be able to bet on picking out my favourite from amongst the others. There's a company in Preston called Booth's Italian Warehousemen, and they import unblended teas. I quite like them, but none of them quite did it for me, until I started mixing and blending them. And what I do now is get a packet of Booth's English Breakfast tea and a packet of Dimbula tea. Dimbula is a fairly weak and delicate unblended tea and English Breakfast is the kind of thing you use to strip paint off skirting boards. I mix the two up in the caddy, and give it a good shake and that's me for the next month. And the food I'd like to go with it is crispy duck with pancakes.

NV: Something of personal value.

SG: I'd actually like to take my watch. Because this is the third watch I've had in my life and the only reason I got rid of the other two was because they wore out. On the other side, what's Time anyway? So it wouldn't matter if it wore out and became inaccurate. It's an object I feel comfortable with, it's something I chose and it's the only piece of personal jewellery that I ever consider wearing. I have a ring somewhere, and it's still in its box. I have a St Christopher medallion that sits in my wife's jewellery box, but a watch I always feel comfortable with and uncomfortable without.

NV: Presuming for a moment you have been called up in front of a Celestial Court, what would you use as your apologia? Perhaps your own work?

SG: I wouldn't take my own books — what I'd take is a copy of Jack Shaeffer's SHANE and I'd stick it on the table and say; "Look, I didn't write this but I really wish I had." Because it's a book that really, really hits the tone — you know, like when you hit a crystal glass and you get a note from it. My feeling about my work is it's not about the incidents in the story, it's all about trying to achieve a tone that rings in the mind of the reader and which puts them in harmony with what you consider to be the essence of your spirit. That is a form of pure communication, mind to mind, and the book and the story and the characters are all the media by which you do that. I think Shaeffer does it perfectly in SHANE. It's a book that resounds in my memory and if I could hit that note just once in my entire career, then I would die satisfied. But as a justification I'm never sure that my own work . . . it's like in THE HORSE'S MOUTH by Joyce Cary, Gulley Jimson the artist always getting fired up with a vision. It's the obsession thing again — he will take over other people's lives, and abuse other people's property to achieve that vision. He will paint on the wall, he'll paint on the ceiling, he'll spend *your* last penny and at the end of it he'll stand back from it and the smile on his face will die, and he'll just shake his head and say: "That's not the vision I had." And walk away. I remember in Alec Guiness' movie version, as he is walking away suddenly the next vision starts to appear, and maybe this time . . . It's like you've got a Platonic ideal somewhere in your mind of the book that you want to write or the story you want to tell, and every stab you have at it gets closer to it in someways, but further from it in others. And at the end of the process, you slump back disappointed, but you realise you've given yourself a little bit more of the armament you need and you say the same thing: 'Maybe next time . . . ' And maybe achieving it 'next time' is the prospect that drives you on and on.

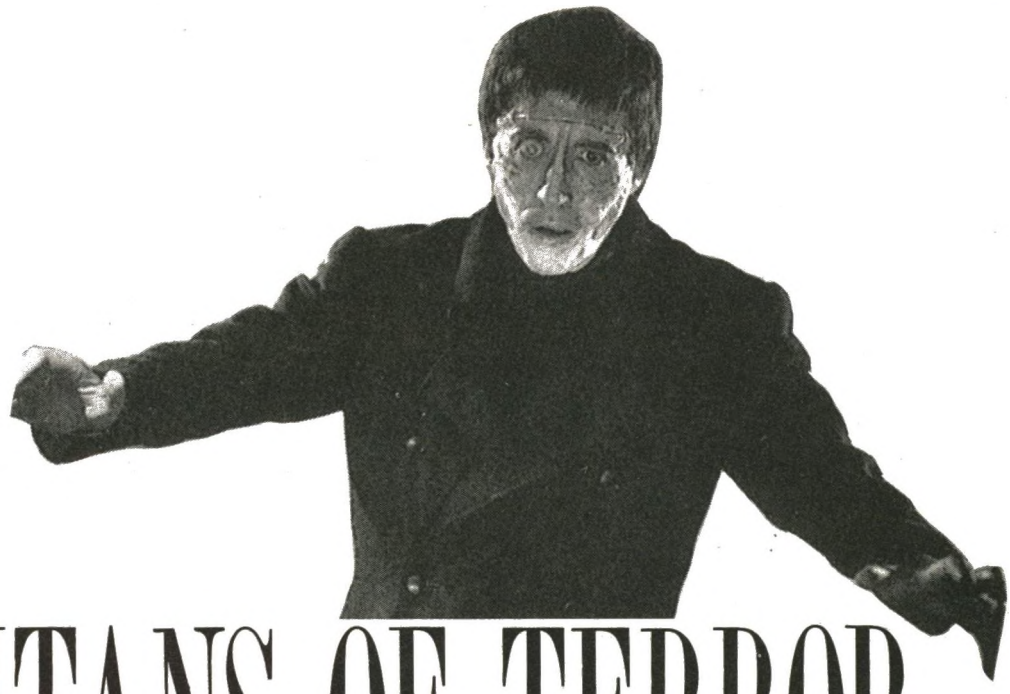
NV: And if as you are being put into the crypt, I say: "Right, we'll give you one more chance to go back and do something you could have done better, something you did wrong or might regret."

SG: I'd like to go back to Leicester Square, sometime in the early eighties and I'd like to stop myself going to see CONAN THE BARBARIAN. I'd like to just stop this guy and say: Listen kid you're just going to waste your afternoon and you're really going to be sorry. In 45 minutes you'll be looking at your watch thinking: 'God, how much more of this is there to go.'

"Their bell caster has died, but his twelve year old assistant says that the bell caster has imparted his knowledge to him, and then if the town will only listen to him, then he'll do the job for them. And he becomes a driven obsessed, twelve year old tyrant, I mean like the Michael Cimino of the bell casting world, marshalling all the resources of the town, bankrupting them, getting all the work force mobilised, taking over the entire landscape to build this huge mountain of the mold of the bell, and then getting the casting done."

"I'm a bit of a tea freak. And I must qualify this by saying that if you set me up at a tea tasting, I would be useless. I wouldn't be able to bet on picking out my favourite from amongst the others."

Horror films are an intriguing area of study; all the more so when you place them in context. Mike Wathen sits in the back row and explains.



TWIN TITANS OF TERROR

FRANKENSTEIN SPILLS IT..! DRACULA DRINKS IT!
IN THE SCREEN'S GREATEST
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HORROR OF DRACULA
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How much shock can the human brain endure before it cracks?" (CRYPT OF HORROR/TERRIFIED). "A Whirlpool of Shrieking Fear. The Most Fiendish Idea Ever Conceived by Human Brain. She Was Beautiful, Desirable And Not Altogether Human. See The Headless Body In Person. Will You Be Trapped In The Whirlpool Of Horror?" (THE BRAINIAC/THE CURSE OF THE CRYING WOMAN).

Fearsome stuff, eh? After that little lot you hardly need bother seeing the films. Now get a load of this: "World's Mightiest Horror!" (THE CYCLOPS/DAUGHTER OF DR. JEKYLL). "The Greatest Names in Terror History in One Big Show!" (BILLY THE KID VS. DRACULA/JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER). "For the First Time. Two Science Fiction Shows in One Program!" (IT CONQUERED THE WORLD/THE SHE CREATURE).

Or, more simply: "Giant Double Horror Show" (THE WALKING DEAD/RETURN OF THE APEMAN). "Mightiest Double Bill In The Universe!" (WAR OF THE SATELLITES/ATTACK OF THE 50FT. WOMAN). Or even: "It's Appalling!" (MAN MADE MONSTER/HORROR ISLAND).

That's right, it's the movie double bill. The most fiendish and desperate attempt to separate the punter from his or her money known to film producers in the pre-video age.

The double bill has existed for a long time. Ever since film distributors realised that a movie hungry world would pay money to see almost anything — but didn't want to pay much. So, by giving the appearance of presenting two 'A' features in one show, they could actually pretend to be saving the populace money and, at the same time, take the curse off the dreaded Supporting Programme which, the producers knew, no one wanted to see. Of course, in practice, most of the films presented in double bills would never have been mistaken for 'A' features in a million years but, hey, that's show biz.

In the days before tv, older films were often sold as double packages for re-issue. Certainly, FRANKENSTEIN and DRACULA made as much money on re-release as they did originally. This trick worked again the 1960s when Seven Arts acquired THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN and (HORROR OF) DRACULA, issued them as a double bill and cleaned up.

Throughout the 30s and 40s interesting but minor films were lumped together as doubles, often with the actors concerned being used in the advertising to form a non-existant theme: "Seven Days Of Stark Terror With The Masters Of Menace" (THE DEVIL COMMANDS (Karloff) and THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK (Lorre) or THE APE (Karloff) and THE HUMAN MONSTER (Lugosi).

Sometimes the ad copy alone suggested a link, as in the almost clever "Sheer, Shivering, Shrieking Horror" tagline for THE FROZEN GHOST and JUNGLE CAPTIVE.

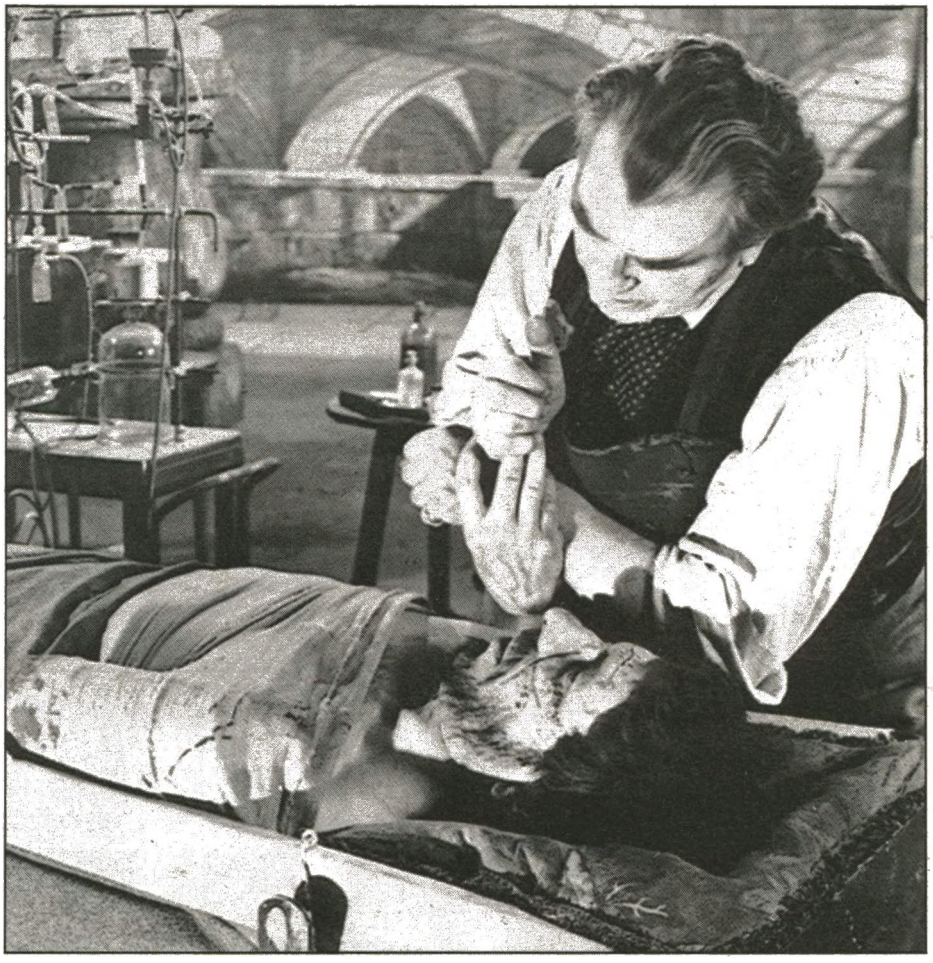
In the 1950s and 1960s, as distributors faced up to dwindling returns as people

FROM THE BOTTOMLESS PIT OF HELL HE CAME
...A NIGHTMARE IN HUMAN FORM!
BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE
ALL NEW
IN EXCITING COLOR
DONALD WOLFIT · BARBARA SHELLEY · VINCENT BALL · VICTOR MADDERN

stayed home to watch tv, the advertising became somewhat less subtle: "Super Shockorama Double-Demon Show! Inhuman King of a World of Gargantuan Beasts! (plus) Blood-Hungry Spawn of the Arch-Fiend" (THE CYCLOPS/DAUGHTER OF DR. JEKYLL); "Double the Terror. Twice the Horror!" (BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE/ MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS); "Crawling Colossus of Terror — Whole Cities Swallowed Up By The Gruesome Glob of Doom! (plus) The She-God of Haunted Island" (CALTIKI THE IMMORTAL MONSTER/TORMENTED); "Fifty Tons Of Creeping Black Horror! It Must East You To Live! (plus) Terror-Bent on Destroying the World!" (THE SPIDER/THE BRAIN EATERS).

England was lucky enough to get this last programme intact and with the same advertising, as one of the few Certificate A (Children allowed in accompanied by an adult) horror bills. More often than not this stuff was Cert X For Adults Only (Well, anyone who looked over sixteen . . .). The UK got "The Show That Shocked America!" (DAY THE WORLD ENDED/PHANTOM FROM 10000 LEAGUES) and "The Most Gruesome Horror Ever Shown" (TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN/BLOOD IS MY HERITAGE — the latter title an improvement over the original US BLOOD OF DRACULA). This bill was also advertised with the astonishing warning "Don't Come Before Dinner". "The Horror Sensation of All Time" turned out to be THE DEAD ONE and THE MONSTER OF PIEDRAS BLANCAS.

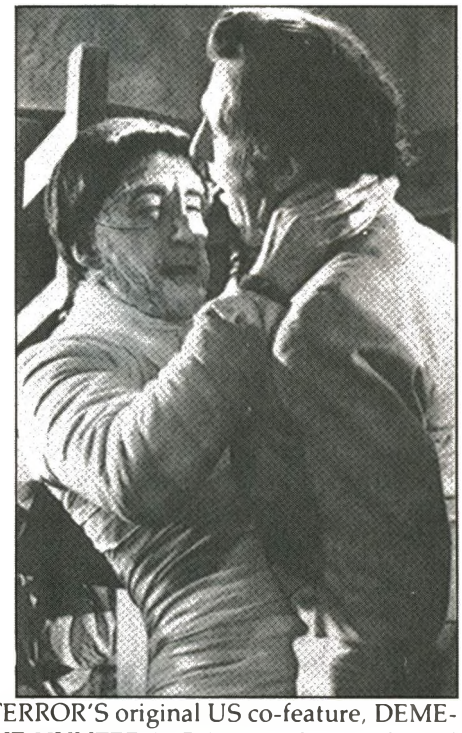
The English home-grown product of the time was treated somewhat differently and all-X programmes were often put together to provide well-rounded entertainment rather than just horror. Thus, although THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN and QUATERMASS II were on general release at about the same time (June 1957 — CURSE having opened in London months before), they were not released together; CURSE going out with THE WOMAN OF ROME and QUATERMASS appearing with AND WOMAN . . . WAS CREATED, the silly English retitling of AND GOD CREATED WOMAN. Another Bardot film, LOVE IS MY PROFESSION, was doubled with BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE ("Will make your blood run hot and cold"). Similar packages from the same time were PASSPORT TO SHAME/HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM, THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS/RIFIFI AND THE WOMEN, THE MOBSTER (retitling of I, MOBSTER)/CITY OF THE DEAD and LIVE NOW, PAY LATER/THE TELL-TALE HEART. PREMATURE BURIAL was released with ORDERED TO LOVE, THE TERROR OF DR. HICHCOCK with THE YELLOW TEDDYBEARS (sex in a girl's school) and THE SPECTRE with SATURDAY NIGHT OUT, a



"THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS needed all the help it could get but co-featuring it with THE LEGION'S LAST PATROL, a would-be cynical look at the French/Algerian war, made in Italy and starring Stewart Granger, can't have helped much."

supposed comedy-drama about sailors on leave. Particularly strange was the pairing of NIGHT OF THE EAGLE (aka BURN WITCH BURN) with SHE'LL HAVE TO GO, a Carry On-style comedy with Bob Monkhouse, Alfred Marks and Hattie Jacques.

By the mid-1960s most distributors had realised that all horror bills seemed to work best for their target audience but there were still anomalies like THE SHUTTERED ROOM/YOU'RE A BIG BOY NOW, THE EVIL FORCE (aka THE 4-D MAN)/THE PARTY'S OVER and FANATIC/THE KILLERS. THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS needed all the help it could get but co-featuring it with THE LEGION'S LAST PATROL, a would-be cynical look at the French/Algerian war, made in Italy and starring Stewart Granger, can't have helped much. Nor was Roger Corman's THE TERROR aided much by THE RAIDERS OF LEYTE GULF, an almost actionless war film directed by Eddie Romero. THE TERROR'S original US co-feature, DEMENTIA 13, became THE HAUNTED AND THE HUNTED in Britain and was released with the sublimely daft CRAWLING HAND. And speaking of daftness, what can one say about I MARRIED A WEREWOLF/WHERE HAS POOR MICKEY GONE? WEREWOLF was a fairly inept German production also called LYCANTHROPUS and WEREWOLF IN A GIRL'S DORMITORY; MICKEY was British, about one hour long and looked like a TV play. Warren Mitchell played an old conjurer and a bunch of semi-professionals played the gang who threaten him. Eventually he is bullied into putting on a magic show for them, and he makes all but one of them dissappear. Strange film.



"And speaking of daftness, what can one say about I MARRIED A WEREWOLF/ WHERE HAS POOR MICKEY GONE?"

IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN!
YOU ARE THERE IN SMOOTHY DARKNESS WHEN THE HEART BEAT STARTS...
Will YOU be the last to speak?
RAY MILLAND
EDGAR ALLAN POE'S
THE PREMATURE BURIAL

Much more mainstream was the seemingly endless stream of Hammer and American International product issued as double bills from about 1963 onwards; MANIAC/THE DAMNED, TALES OF TERROR/PANIC IN YEAR ZERO, THE GORGON/CURSE OF THE MUMMY'S TOMB, THE RAVEN/DR. CRIPPEN, PHANTOM OF THE OPERA/CAPTAIN CLEGG, MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH/MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES, KISS OF THE VAMPIRE/PARANOIAC, TOMB OF LIGEIA/ BLACK SABBATH, etc, etc. William Castle's films were fair game for double bills, of course; HOMICIDAL with TERROR OF THE TONGS, STRAIT-JACKET with THE SYSTEM, THE NIGHT WALKER with SECRET OF BLOOD ISLAND and MR. SARDONICUS with the quite dreadful THIRTEEN FRIGHTENED GIRLS.

The less major cinema circuits had the likes of VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE, a not very convincing Japanese monster movie in partnership with THE DEMON DOCTOR ("A Nightmare of Terror in the Macabre — See The Maniac Doctor in the Horror Film of the Age — He Lures Lovely Women for Monstrous Experiments"); SEDDOK, SON OF SATAN/ FRANTIC; DROPS OF BLOOD/CONFESS, DR. CORDER; CASTLE OF TERROR/HORROR, COMEDY OF TERRORS/THE EVIL EYE; THE HEAD/PLAYGIRLS AND THE VAMPIRE and, of course, THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH/THE CURSE OF THE LIVING CORPSE, two works of sublime surrealism.

This is by no means a complete listing of double bills of the time. As the 1960s worn on more and more bizarre combinations of film titles fought for room in fewer cinemas. And as for the 1970s . . . Stick around till next month when we'll rediscover such odd pairings as bikers and transplants, androids and mutinies, and even Britt Ekland and 'Mind the doors'.

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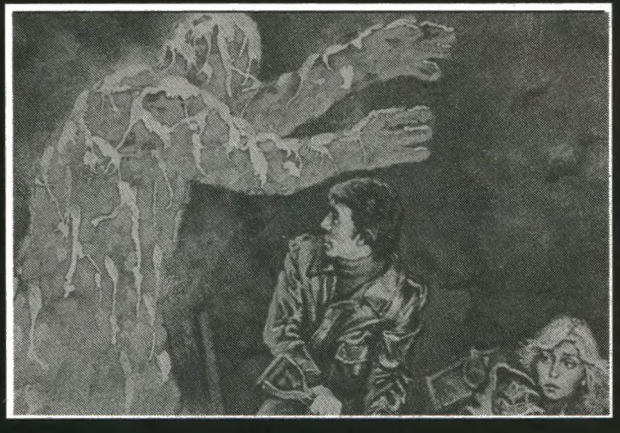

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BYE-BYE

Psychopaths — where would the horror industry be without them, a-hacking and a-slashing? Perhaps, suggests Caroline Dunford, it's time to consider what really goes on inside their minds. Hence this story.

Does a hug remind you of an arctic roll? It does me. I always feel like the ice-cream centre in the middle and my partner as he wraps his brown arms around me is the sponge. And then, well you know, if you're with the right person, it's like being bunged into the centre of a very hot oven. As the passion rises I go all soft, which isn't something you'd think of me, is it? I mean me being a killer and all.

I like to think that killing's a profession like any other, but of course, it isn't. What other job could possibly give you such an adrenalin high? If I'd had a great musical talent I'd have been a pop star. I can sing ok, which has come in useful once or twice, but no more. Now if I'd lived a few centuries ago I could have been an expensive courtesan, or perhaps an oriental ninja — I've always looked good in black. But nowadays there aren't many openings for a girl like me. What a cliche, but it's true.

You've got to understand I'm not an ordinary thug. I'm quite extra-ordinary. At school I registered so highly on the IQ scale the results were invalid. So I got sent off to special school. That's where I met Carlyn. He was my tutor and boy did he teach me a lot. If you've ever met Carlyn then you'll know he's not the archetypal teacher, renowned in his field, but he uses the system to get what he wants. I can respect that man, even if I do mean to kill him. What better place to recruit and train a bunch of top-notch killers than at a government school for the high IQ-ers. We were being taught that we were outside normal morals, that we could figure out what was best for us, where as the herds have to follow a set of rules coz they don't know any better. It was their way of making sure we would do whatever they wanted, even try the infamous breeding programmer. Who knows if I hadn't discharged myself at 17 to follow Carlyn I might have been working as a government killer by now. This way I get better pay. I also get to screw the system — that's a good feeling.

Don't let my way of talking fool you, I've been very well educated. This accent, this style of speaking, in part it's a cover and it's like smoking, a bad addiction hard to break. Looking at me in all this leather and hearing me talk you'd think I was tough, huh? You'd hire me for a job, yeah? Course if I was going for a sophisticated project I'd angle myself different. But you chum, you don't call for that. You on my wavelength yet? When you have my intellect, my love of excitement and passion for living, ordinary life is boring. Maybe if I'd gone into modern medicine I'd have become another Madame Curie, but I've never been one for self-sacrifice. I want it all and I want it now.

Let me tell you about my first kill. The first time for anything is special and that goes double for the kill. George Lavine Rouchee, millionaire, international personality and multi-corporation big guy. Lavine had got some guys real mad, and Carlyn, I'll tell you more about him later, said it sounded easy. A good run in for me. For twenty-five percent of the mark he'd help me plan it. Carlyn's smart like me. We get along.

Now you'll have to forgive me if I get a bit weird here. I can get poetic about my job. You have to be. You'll see why. Lavine was a lover of women and a hunter of foxes. (I always thought of him as Lavine, reminded me of lavatory, sewers and shit.) I was to use these to destroy him. Irony and fatality are the most perfect of bedfellows. There is a peculiar piquant taste linked to the kill that meets out one tiny measure of justice. Perhaps it is because even now after so many kills, I like a sense of accomplishment that is not merely the satisfaction of a perfect crime, but the chance to play god. If god really exists, he's never troubled me and I think I play the part better than any mythical eastern superbeing. Carlyn always warned me that after 50 kills I'd have to call it quits, become a manager like him, maybe. He's offered me a share in the business before. But me, I kept going. I'm too good to get catch. Besides I don't want to die behind a desk. I'll die in the field like a soldier of old in the days when there really were right sides to fight for in a battle.

You'd agree I'm good looking, right. (You'd probably agree to anything right now,

"I like to think that killing's a profession like any other, but of course it isn't. What other job could possibly give you such an adrenalin high?"

but I am.) And it's real, this cascading tumble of burnished gold. I got it all in the starting package, bright, cunning and beautiful. It's the first two you can't do without, but the last makes you feel good and makes people believe in your innocence. Yeah, you can get plastic surgery. That's fine if you enjoy pain and have the time to recuperate for months in a hospital bed. The results never look as good anyway. Could be the way people wear them, but I can always tell a false from a born beauty.

The soap-opera queens you see on the telly look capable of any evil in or without the bedroom, but who ever suspects Goldilocks with her wide blue eyes and the smell of youth on her fresh, curving, supple body. Men want to seduce me, corrupt me. They can't believe I know it all. I'm all the incestuous dreams of fairyland and offspring desire. Beauty and the beast, Carlyn calls me and I love him for it. He showed me how to use my looks without abusing my integrity. I knew so much about everything, but me, until I met Carlyn. The first, Lavine, was my initiation. If I'd failed or given any of them away Carlyn would have killed me, but you know all I could think about on that job was the fact that he wasnt with me. My mentor, friend and my major failing, Carlyn, lover and guide, free-er and entrapper. It won't be long before I have to do something about him.

Be silent! Listen, Lavine was holding a house party at his manor down in Siddingwell. Maybe you heard about it. The whole event caused quite a fuss in the press. Not that anyone ever suspected murder. The first problem was how to get me into that house. Sure, even then the organisation was good enough to set up a false background. I mean with even a little of the up front money we could have got me a fast car, clothes and a personality, but that in itself would not have been enough to entrap Lavine. My innocence and ignorance would rest on Lavine's interest in me and not mine in him. I had to appear distant, an unwilling suspector dragged into an unpleasant event. There was no chance any investigation would pass me by, with my looks you can count on being the centre of attention. I remember one thoroughly frightening time when I was questioned, so politely, by the police over a murder I had committed, but was convinced couldnt be traced to me. I sat there through the whole interview wracking my brains trying to track down the weak link that had lead to my suspicion. It's important to stay one ahead. Even if there was a weak link I was pretty sure I could cover it if I could work out what it was. By the end I had nothing. I was terrified.

It was only a nightmare-filled week later that I discovered what had induced that particular officer to interview for me two hours. He had wanted the opportunity to be alone with me. Just when I was at my most venerable he turned up on my doorstep explaining kindly that the murderer had been found and expressing the hope, most markedly, that we might meet again under less officious circumstances. I had him demoted. Carlyn was furious. He held that I shouldn't have brought so much attention to myself. It was six years ago in another country and he still won't let me forget it. He's probably right, but I have a grudge against men, who see me as their weak and defenceless prey. If I could I would kill every man who treats me like that. Yes, of course I'm slightly insane, but you have to be to be in this profession and enjoy it. I don't think I'm any worse than a man like Lavine.

Carlyn solved the problem of how to join the house party. To be honest he solved all the problems, but not with the finesse I now have to use. Think about it. You know all those books you read about amateur detectives like Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, with all those amateur interested murder spectators, who just happen to be there or nearby when murder takes place. Personally if I was the investigating officer I would start to suspect ol' Ma Marple herself. You get the idea? You can't be associated with murder cases, plural. Even one is risking it.

There aren't that many murder cases that are subject to full-scale investigations no matter what the public may think and as most of my clients are public figures they are usually the ones that have money spent on them. On the first job it didn't matter if I was noticed and Carlyn thought it would give me more confidence if I was. Besides here was the opportunity to set up important connections for the name I was to play.

Bearing all this in mind Carlyn suggested what we have come to call the medieval option. It's really effective and we've used often in less exhalted cases. The men always lap it up. I guess there is truth in those old fairy-tales after all, even if it's only a sideswipe at the dupability of men.

Fox hunt in a woodland countryside on horseback, Lavine is known for traversing other people's land what does this suggest? You've probably got it by now. We laid the trail for the hounds. Carlyn got the fox and the hounds picked up the new trail. Meanwhile Carlyn is in a van heading to reset the fox further up the false trail. It all involved some pretty tricky timing, especially so the horsemen didn't see Carlyn take the fox, but he's good at that sort of thing. Along the false trail lie I, clothing askew from a tumble from my horse, which has of course bolted. I'm not a very good horse-

"If I'd lived a few centuries ago I could have been an expensive courtesan, or perhaps an oriental ninja. I've always looked good in black. But nowadays there aren't many openings for a girl like me."

woman and I did indeed sprain my arm in the fall. Carlyn would have done that on purpose if it had been him. It's been carefully arranged that I'm staying with a local family that Lavine hasn't yet met, but is almost worthy of his notice. Needless to say from where I lie his house is nearer than theirs. Obvious and blatant, but predictably he fell for my golden tresses and painfilled eyes and had me borne away to his house. I had one hundred and one lines plotted to make sure it happened as I wanted it, but I didn't need one, Carlyn had got his character sussed. Not really surprising when you consider Carlyn's a psychiatrist oblique psychologist. Yes, that's right Carlyn O'Bryan. I believe he's quite well respected in the academic world.

So wounded and isolated in this man's house, I quickly let it be known that although I was staying with this family I didn't know them well and was perhaps a little in awe of them. Lavine couldn't resist it. I had no money, no status, no protector and I reminded him, as I was meant to, of a hunted creature at bay. I gave him no encouragement except what my obvious distrust and almost violent dislike of him were meant to do. I let him know I was aware of his reputation and fearful of being in his house. I was never rude, that would have ruined the appeal of the forest maiden, but I let him know. Carlyn and I had thought of leading him into a rape attempt, drugged if necessary . . . Carlyn has good drug connections, but I felt it was sordid and Carlyn thought I wasn't good enough to pull it off. Murder in self defence is not for the continuing pro. Sure, we've shown a few how to do it to get rid of a one off. Didn't you know we ran a murder school? Probably not, it's very select.

Lavine had a weak heart. It's surprising how many of these executive type people do. Stress I imagine, although if anything's messing up your body that bad I can't understand why anyone would continue. I suppose it's greed, you tell me. Anyway it's a good sideway into dying for people like us, assassins. Does it bother you that I call myself that? I've often found that people aren't too good at taking things for what they truly are. The great human game of pretence, the old argument of the difference between a special divisions officer and me — he's sanctioned by the government. Well so am I sanctioned by someone, someone with money and some of my clients in the past have been, I reckon, as important as our government. In fact I think they may even have hired me once. Lavine made a lot of money out in dubious areas of the world, South Africa, slave labour in India and the like. For all I know he may have hired assassins in the past. Not us, obviously, it's not good policy to accept a contract on a previous client. That makes us popular.

So there I am stuck with Lavine. He's arranged a room near to his own, a courtesy I never thanked him for, and his servants are scurrying around feeding the guests from the aborted hunt finding the doctor etc. Carlyn had directed me to ask for a room on the ground floor with patio windows. Not as hard as it sounds. Most of the rooms in the guest wing were like that. There were a range of well known suites. You know the kind of thing, the garden room, the Japanese room, the Bolivian room — opened to the great unwashed on public days. The family I stayed with lived 'in the region' and talked about the big house so it wouldn't be too surprising if I expressed a girlish hope to see one of these famous rooms. Lavine was rich enough to put his guests in these surrounds. He was never into preservation whether it be antiques or rain forests. In the end I didn't have to say a word. Carlyn's idea was to wait and see where they put me and only if it wasn't what I wanted to say anything. Never be more obvious than is necessary. It's amazing how much fortune really does favour the brave. The Indians and Egyptians believed in a god for assassins and I'm with them.

In my room awaiting the doctor Lavine stops by. I can still remember the conversation. Let me do this in detail for you . . .

I remember there was the cool smell of spring blowing in through the open patio doors, the smell you associate with long, tall glasses filled with home-made lemonade or, if you're Lavine, champagne cocktails. I'd limped to the doors to throw them open. Standing there in the breeze, a little awkwardly because of my ankle, but the unsuitable summer print dress clinging to my skin and my wavy blonde hair blowing in the breeze, I must have looked a model in some cinema 2 poster. Lavine had no taste he fell for it. I could feel Carlyn's eyes on us as we talked. It was for Carlyn's benefit I had opened the doors. I knew he was outside, waiting.

"You shouldn't be standing on that foot, you know," he sounded concerned, but propitiatory.

"It's really not that bad, Mr Rouchee. There was no need for all this."

"Isn't it every young girl's dream to be rescued from distress by a handsome knight," he moved closer, "or failing that a millionaire."

I could smell his aftershave now. It was the expensive type, brash but with no distinction. It rather suited him. He hadn't changed his riding clothes and he still smelt of horse and sweat. I imagine he thought that was rather appealing, sexy. I thought he stank. He moved to the open doors on the pretext of pointing out his security men.

"See, you're perfectly safe here," he gestured to a man in the grounds wearing a heavy jacket in spite of the summery weather. He pointed out the bulge under the henchman's coat and named the gun. He got it wrong. I'm still not sure if he was trying to impress me or whether it was some form of abstract threat: you are in my domain. Unlike now it was frowned on for men to have their own private armed force. Of course it's necessary today. All I knew was if I hadn't known that Carlyn was out there, even I would have felt oppressed by him, and I am by no means helpless.

"Is the doctor coming?" I asked shyly.

He grinned broadly at my choice of verb, like a schoolboy and I felt myself blush. I think he was going to make some crude joke till he saw the colour flood my face, that aroused his interest. Isn't it strange how men always seem to want the innocent most? I suppose that isn't completely fair, but certainly it applies to men of his sort. He wasn't evil, simply used to getting his own way. I dont suppose he had ever met anyone he couldn't buy. That must give you a bad opinion of the human race. Mind you, I'm not sure that point of view isn't perfectly valid.

"I thought you said all the fuss was unnecessary." He winked conspiratorially. "But don't fret my dear. He'll be along in a little while. You won't have to put up with my company that much longer."

I turned my face up to him and stammered prettily that I hadn't meant to offend him. It was just that he did have rather a reputation. I blushed like a pro and he responded to the shy flower opening her petals to him. I carefully closed one of the door and sat down on a florid sofa inviting him to take the seat opposite me. He sat next to me. Meanwhile Carlyn responded to my signal.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like both doors shut?" He got up and fortuitously went to the door just as the fox entered.

"Good God! Where the hell did that come from?"

"From the hunt," I suggested harshly, then I screamed. "Look at its mouth! It's foaming. Is the rabies scare over in this part of the world?"

He turned a sickly shade of white. The fox darted across the room and lurched drunkenly about. Then it picked up the scent of the drugged food scrap I had dropped in his coat pocket as we stood by the window and went for him. While Lavine was occupied, or should I say terrified, I took the little gas syringe out of my pocket, assembled it in three seconds as Carlyn had taught me, pressed the tiny mask to my mouth and nose and averting my face and set the vapour off in his face.

He never knew what happened. I could tell that from the bewildered expression in his corpse. I crushed the fragile mask between my fingers to dust and quickly reassembled the syringe. In seconds it was heroin-filled and tucked in Lavine's pocket, like most business men just after the drug legalisation programme he was stupid enough to have the habit. The gas cylinder went the way of the mask, crumbs in my skirt pocket. I got the scrap out of his pocket and the fox dutifully ate it. Breathing again, I ran for the window, yelling for the henchman, who was just about to turn the corner at the east end of the wing. Carlyn and I had timed it perfectly. We had also been very lucky. It taken two minutes and ten seconds to commit the murder.

The fox seemed somewhat confused, the drugged scrap and perhaps even a whiff of the fumes, coupled with the soap tablet Carlyn had given it were making it feel sick. I felt a bit bad about that, but the drugs in the scrap corrected everything. The smell of bitter almonds hung in the air and I opened wide the door and ran into the garden.

"Help, help. Oh my God help!" Very unoriginal I know, but people really do say such stuff in times of stress. Anyone who's profoundly witty or meaning full is up to something and worthy of suspicion."

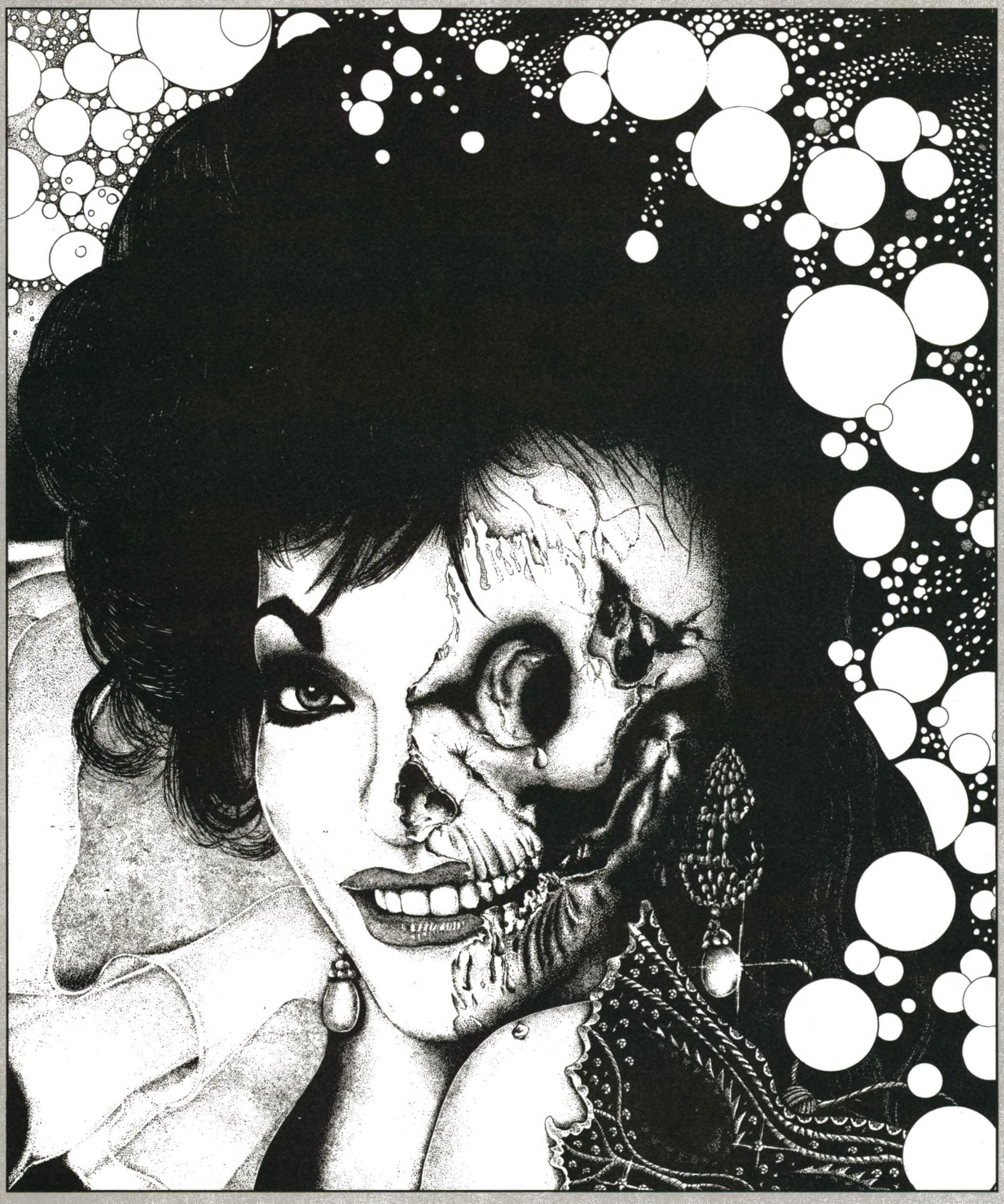
I expect you know the rest. Within half an hour Lavine's country manor was a blaze of flashing blue lights, helicopters, army vans, the lot. None of it helped him. He was long gone well past resus and sure enough, just as Carlyn had said, the verdict death by misadventure came in one month later and I was in the business.

Can you hear the car engine outside? That's Carlyn, I'm making him sweat. He's waiting to pick me up, risking his neck coz of me. I'm going to have to kill him before he gets me. Both of us know that we endanger the other too much. We take too many risks relying on one another to pull us out of trouble and we make bad decisions based on emotion and pride. 'Course I don't want to kill him any more than he does me, but it's going to have to be done. Life can be real shitty at times.

But you, you are special. You should be honoured. I'm doing it straight for you. It's a kind of celebration. I don't normally talk to my clients, but you're my 101st kill. I'm going to pull this little trigger and put a bullet right between your baby blues. Quicker than a lot of them I've done. Then I'm going to jump into Carlyn's car and ride into the night. I'm going to get him to stop at the Dreant Hotel and hire a bridal suite. We're going to make love all night. You can haunt us if you want. I'll think of you. I might even imagine he's you once or twice. I gotta go, got a big night ahead. Bye-bye.

"The soap-opera queens you see on the telly look capable of any evil in or without the bedroom, but who ever suspects Goldilocks with her wide blue eyes and the smell of youth on her fresh, curving, supple body."

"It's a kind of celebration. I don't normally talk to my clients, but you're my 101st kill. I'm going to pull this little trigger and put a bullet right between your baby blues. Quicker than a lot of them I've done."



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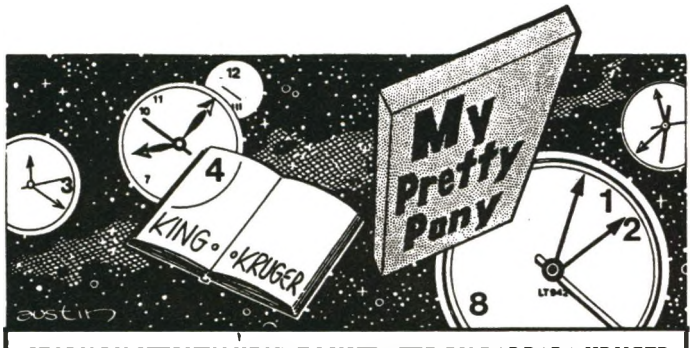

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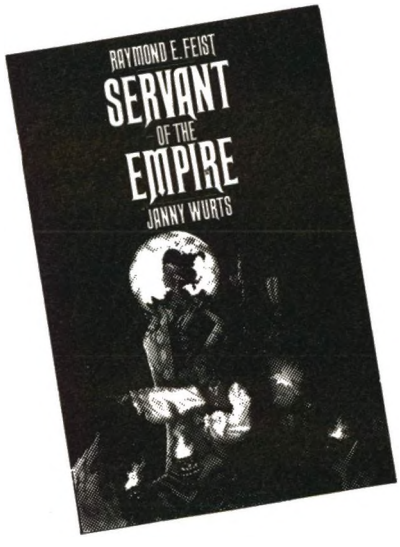

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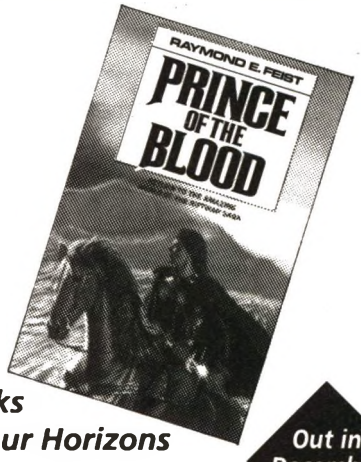

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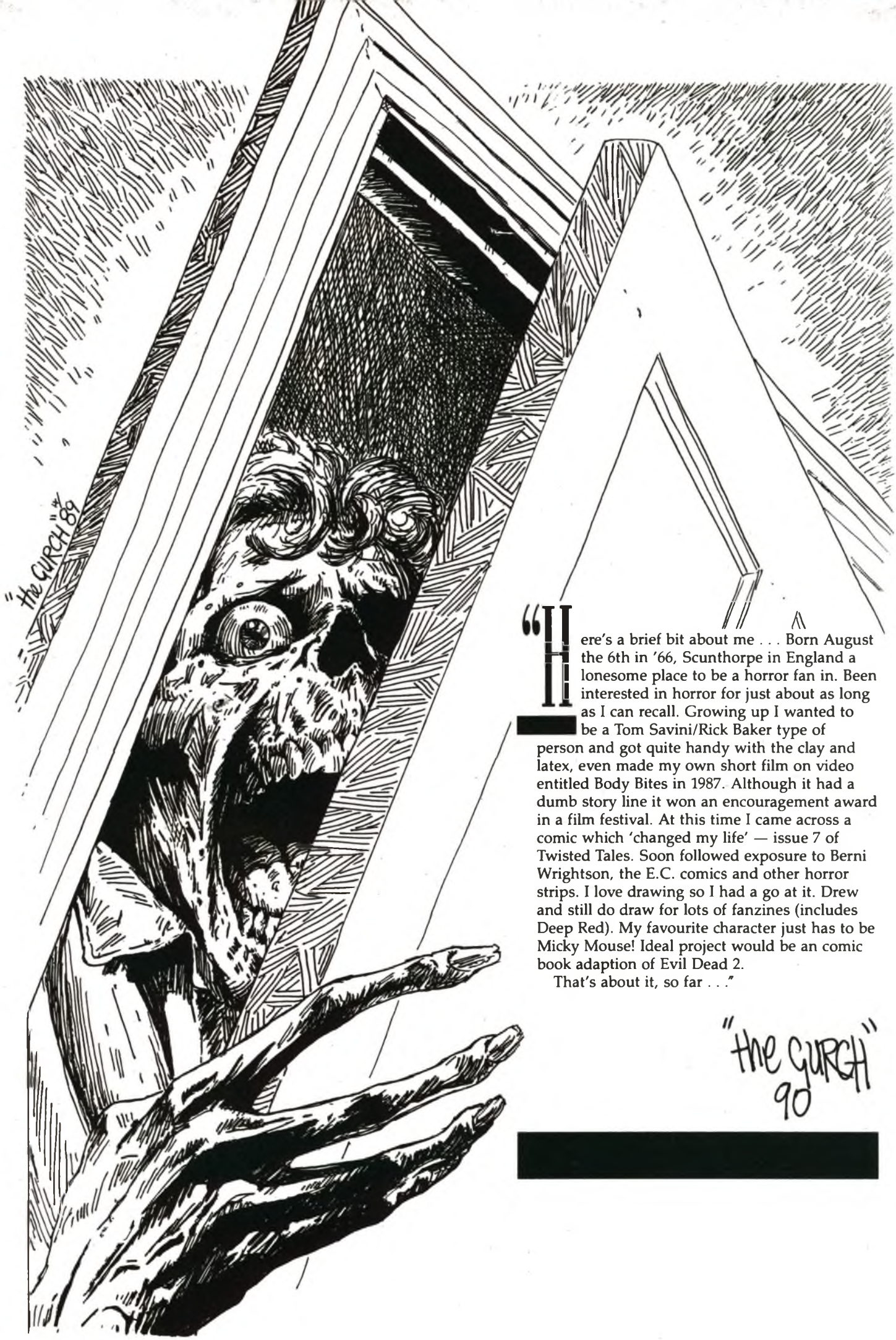

"Here's a brief bit about me . . . Born August the 6th in '66, Scunthorpe in England a lonesome place to be a horror fan in. Been interested in horror for just about as long as I can recall. Growing up I wanted to be a Tom Savini/Rick Baker type of person and got quite handy with the clay and latex, even made my own short film on video entitled Body Bites in 1987. Although it had a dumb story line it won an encouragement award in a film festival. At this time I came across a comic which 'changed my life' — issue 7 of Twisted Tales. Soon followed exposure to Berni Wrightson, the E.C. comics and other horror strips. I love drawing so I had a go at it. Drew and still do draw for lots of fanzines (includes Deep Red). My favourite character just has to be Micky Mouse! Ideal project would be an comic book adaption of Evil Dead 2.

That's about it, so far . . ."

"the GURGH" 90

PORTFOLIO

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WHO HAS EVER HAD
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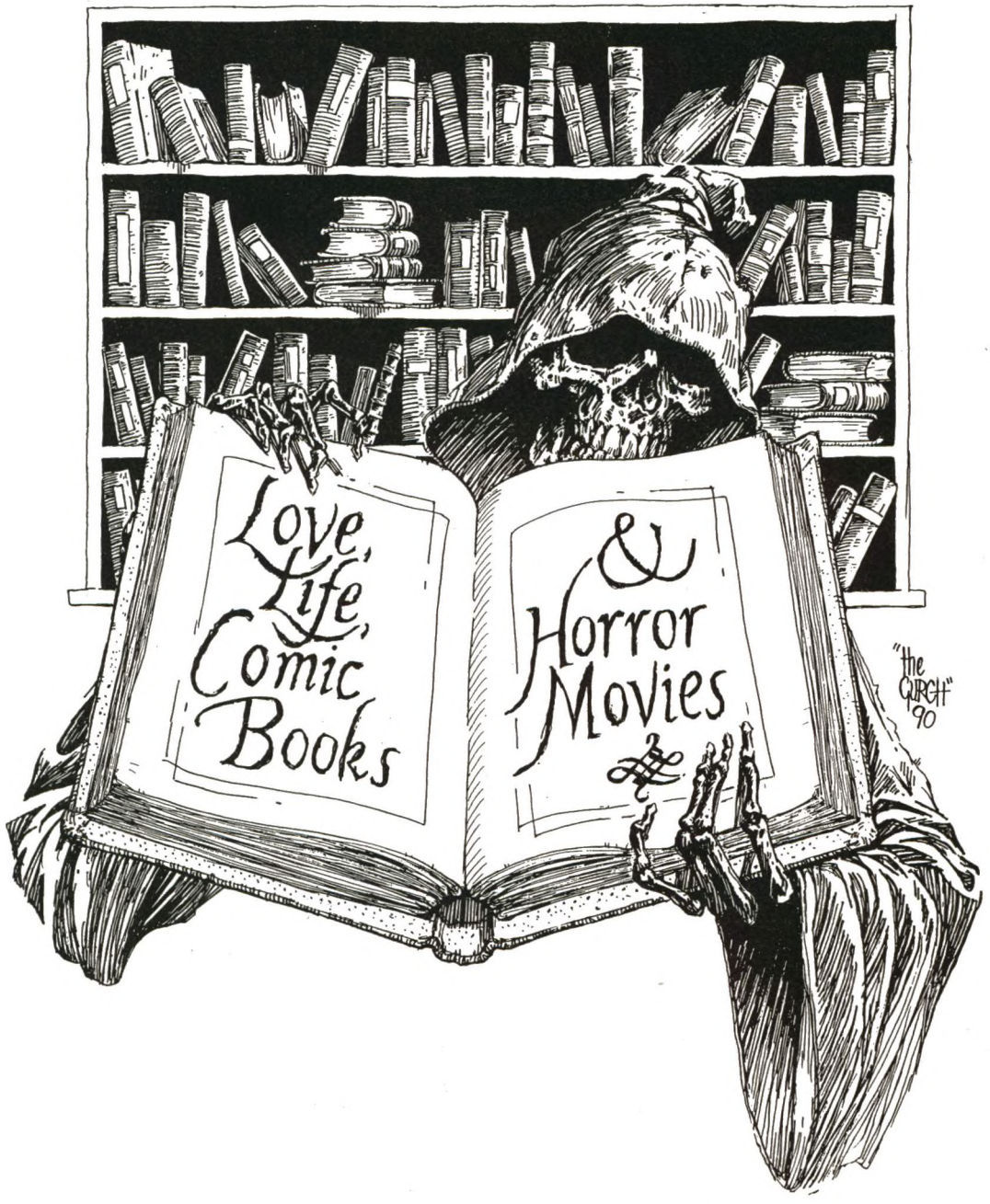
Love, Life, Comic Books
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MOVING OUT

Masks, reality, remorse, compulsion and playfulness all inter-react in Nicholas Royle's short story. All of which helps to explain why he's marked down as a rising star in the horror world.

I don't know what she told her friends about her reasons for moving out, but I wasn't convinced it was just because of the new job. It was based on the east coast, seventy miles away. She could hardly commute, could she? her look seemed to say.

But did she really have to shift *all* her stuff and *buy* a flat rather than rent somewhere?

I thought we'd got on OK in my flat; it seemed to work fine. There was no indication that she tired of my frequent games and traps, which were never anything more than elaborate jokes.

Sometimes, for fun, I used to try and frighten her; tense my muscles and affix an expression to my face, then move slowly towards her. She'd return the stare as long as she could, then fear crept suddenly into her eyes and I had to laugh to break the spell. "Did I really frighten you?" "Yes," she said, hurt. "I'm sorry." I showed concern and concealed my pleasure. It was only a game.

She took everything. Her collection of masks left a very empty wall in the bedroom, stubbled with nails. The bathroom shelf was suddenly made bare; forgotten tubs of moisturising cream and rolled-up flattened tubes of toothpaste, even these things were taken. I saw her cast a mournful eye over my tailor's dummy.

"When I get my own place," she had once said, "will you give me this?"

She often asked. I didn't know why it was so important to her; she could have picked one up in any junk shop. I saw her from the kitchen one day, when she hadn't heard me come in from outside. She was kneeling at the mannequin's castors and clinging to its waist. Crying her eyes out.

I still didn't understand its significance.

She moved on a Saturday. I went along to help. Her new job came with a car, an estate, which was good because she would never have squeezed everything into my Mini.

I was ignored when I offered to drive. I knew what she'd say if she bothered to answer: I wasn't insured because we weren't married.

She didn't even give me a chance to climb in next to her, before moving swiftly away from the kerb, spinning her wheels through gutterfuls of litter.

I looked at the features of the Mini as I approached it. The radiator grille — the car's mouth — had been buckled for a couple of weeks, and one of the eyes had a smashed lens. I had to wrench the door open. The engine wheezed into life and I moved off. The front offside wheel scraped against the wheel arch, but a bald tyre was a small sacrifice. I'd said I'd help her move, and help her I would, with or without her cooperation.

"Sometimes, for fun, I used to try and frighten her; tense my muscles and affix an expression to my face, then move slowly towards her."

I had my work cut out keeping up with her. She darted and surged, switching lanes in her haste like there was no one else on the road. I had to rely on steady progress, the weight of the boxes in the back of her car and the re-tuning I'd had done two months earlier.

Her block of flats had a lift. If there hadn't been so many heavy boxes and bags to carry, she would have climbed the stairs, despite her flat being on the sixth floor. She had always hated lifts.

It wasn't just the discomfort of being crammed into what was basically a large tin, with a number of strangers; nor was it the embarrassment of awkward silences and accidentally crossed stares. Lifts terrified her.

Which offered me endless opportunities whenever we went anywhere and had to use a lift.

I only had to stand there, glaze my eyes over and turn slowly towards her, and she would panic.

"No, Nick! No!"

She once bolted out of a life in a multi-storey carpark and ran straight into an old Vauxhall. She might have got away with a few bruises, had the car been stationary.

"'A mask is only a mask,' she said. 'It's not ambiguous. There's nothing behind it.' But in order to frighten her, I always had to start off by masking my features."

Some months later, one afternoon when she had gone out for a walk to help built up her strength, I rigged up a dummy out of some of my clothes, which I found in the wardrobe, and had it hanging in a noose from the kitchen doorway by the time she got back.

The relapse set her back about three months.

I regretted doing it but as I explained, it was only a joke.

It always puzzled me why she liked masks when she was so easily frightened by faces.

"A mask is only a mask," she said. "It's not ambiguous. There's nothing behind it." But in order to frighten her, I always had to start off by masking my features.

"There's nothing but wall behind my masks," she'd explained.

"Why do you like them so much?" I demanded.

"People used to believe that traumatic events that had not yet taken place could send back echoes from the future," she explained. "These echoes would sometimes register in masks."

"Like a satellite dish?" I quipped.

She gave me a black look.

"Why don't they show up in faces?" I asked.

"Because we block them. A mask can't. That's why you scare me when you fix your face like a mask. Sometimes the echoes are like the real thing."

I stared at her now from the corner of the lift in her new home, but she looked no more distressed than she had when I'd snatched glances in her mirror during the drive up. Now it was her turn to wear a mask, the mask of tragedy. Yes, it would hurt, but she had to make the break. That kind of thing. Stony-faced resolve, with just the occasional glimpse of what looked like terror animating her glass eyes. She only had to say, if she didn't want me there.

But not a word was uttered. In fact, I couldn't recall the last time she had addressed me at all. I was blurring reality and imagination, not sure afterwards if she had said something or if I had imagined it from the look on her face.

The flat was on two floors. Not bad for the price and with a sweeping view of the sea front and port. At night the lights on the promenade would be pretty.

The staircase leading to the upper rooms was situated in the middle of the flat between the kitchen and the living room. You could walk right around the enclosed staircase, through the kitchen, the hallway and the living room. Actually under the stairs there was a cupboard, at its tallest about as tall as me.

I was able to follow her around from room to room and remain unseen. I tailed her just close enough to let her know I was there. She stopped and looked round, eyes flashing with anger and fear, but I was always just out of sight.

Later, after a light meal, I tried to talk to her. As if *I'd* done anything to upset *her*. "What's wrong?" I asked her.

She didn't feel like talking.

She slumped in a chair in front of the French windows. The curtains were closed, which meant she couldn't see the view. I pulled them back for her. It was dark now. The lights *were* pretty.

But with a snort she'd jumped up and quit the room as soon as I opened the curtain.

Anyone can take a hint, but it's somehow nicer to sit down and talk things out.

She clung to the edge of the sink, her face white as enamel. "I'll make a drink," I suggested.

Thrusting out an arm she opened the fridge door and bent down to get the milk out. She started when she saw the car keys next to the butter. I'd put them there just after we'd arrived.

"Driving back up with the dummy lying silently on the back seat, I saw its bulk whenever I checked the rear-view mirror. Was it not too silent and bland? It needed a mask."

"What's the matter?" I pleaded.

I'd often hidden her things in the fridge at my flat, as a joke; her reaction never more than a laugh or a groan.

She slammed the fridge door, ignoring me, and ran upstairs where she shut herself in her bedroom.

I took the keys out of the fridge and put them quietly down on the table, then sat down and thought about what might happen next. The simplest would be for me just to go. Would that be seen as giving in or a dignified withdrawal? Two of her Malaysian leather masks gazed unresponsively down at me from the wall above the portable television.

I became aware of a murmur of conversation through the ceiling. I stood up and craned my neck. Although the actual words were indistinguishable, I could tell it was her voice, and unanswered.

I walked quietly down the hall to the telephone extension. Hoping she wouldn't hear the click, I lifted the receiver to my ear.

". . . Mini was his."

I frowned. What were they talking about?

". . . but the things that are happening here, I'm terrified. I feel like I'm going mad or something. I keep hearing this terrible squealing."

I dropped the phone and rubbed my forehead, which was prickling with perspiration.

I couldn't decide what was the best thing to do, given her state of mind. But since my presence was obviously not helping, I decided to call it a day.

Closing the front door quietly behind me, I stepped into early morning darkness and thick fog. The car was some minutes' walk away. The plastic-covered seat was cold and sweating, the windscreen obscured inside and out. I proceeded, hunched over the wheel, the choke full out, wiping the condensation away with tissues and the fog with protesting wipers. The headlamps pushed into the fog, illuminating nothing but clouds of billowing moisture. The full beam was less help.

More by chance than navigation I found the dual carriageway and caught up with a set of red lights, which, when I narrowed the gap to eighteen inches, I could see belonged to a large container lorry.

In order to continue to enjoy the false security of the lorry's slipstream, I was obliged to accelerate to sixty miles per hour. I could scarcely credit the drivers who from time to time overtook me in the outside lane. My own knees had liquified in the fear that I would fail to register the lorry's brake lights, should they come on.

Because of the unshrinking blanket of fog, I never saw the sign warning of roads merging and so remained ignorant of the danger unit six lanes of traffic suddenly tried to squeeze into three.

Given the appalling visibility and the speed the influx of traffic was travelling at (coming from the west, where the fog would be thinner), there were bound to be some casualties.

A USAF jeep shunted me into the lorry I'd been sheltering behind, and an Audi overtaking on the outside caught my wing.

Then, dimly, I began to understand what she had meant about the echoes. Sometimes, she had said, the echoes are like the real thing.

I only stayed long enough to pick up the tailor's dummy.

It would function as a present and as a surprise. Hopefully, she would have calmed down overnight and was probably already indulging herself in contrition.

Driving back up with the dummy lying silently on the back seat, I saw its bulk whenever I checked the rear-view mirror. Was it not too silent and bland? It needed a mask.

Also in the mirror I saw the mask I would give it.

The car coughed and clanked, but somehow made it.

She was out, at work, as I'd anticipated.

I went to the cupboard under the stairs. Three boxes sat in a corner and a couple of coats hung on hooks. The dummy, with its mask, was the same height as me.

Patiently I awaited the end of the working day.

I heard the key in the front door, the shuffle of letters, the tap of an executive briefcase on kitchen linoleum.

Footsteps. A yawn. More steps.

She pulled open the door.

A tremor went through her body; she stepped back; her mouth fell open but any sound was choked in her throat.

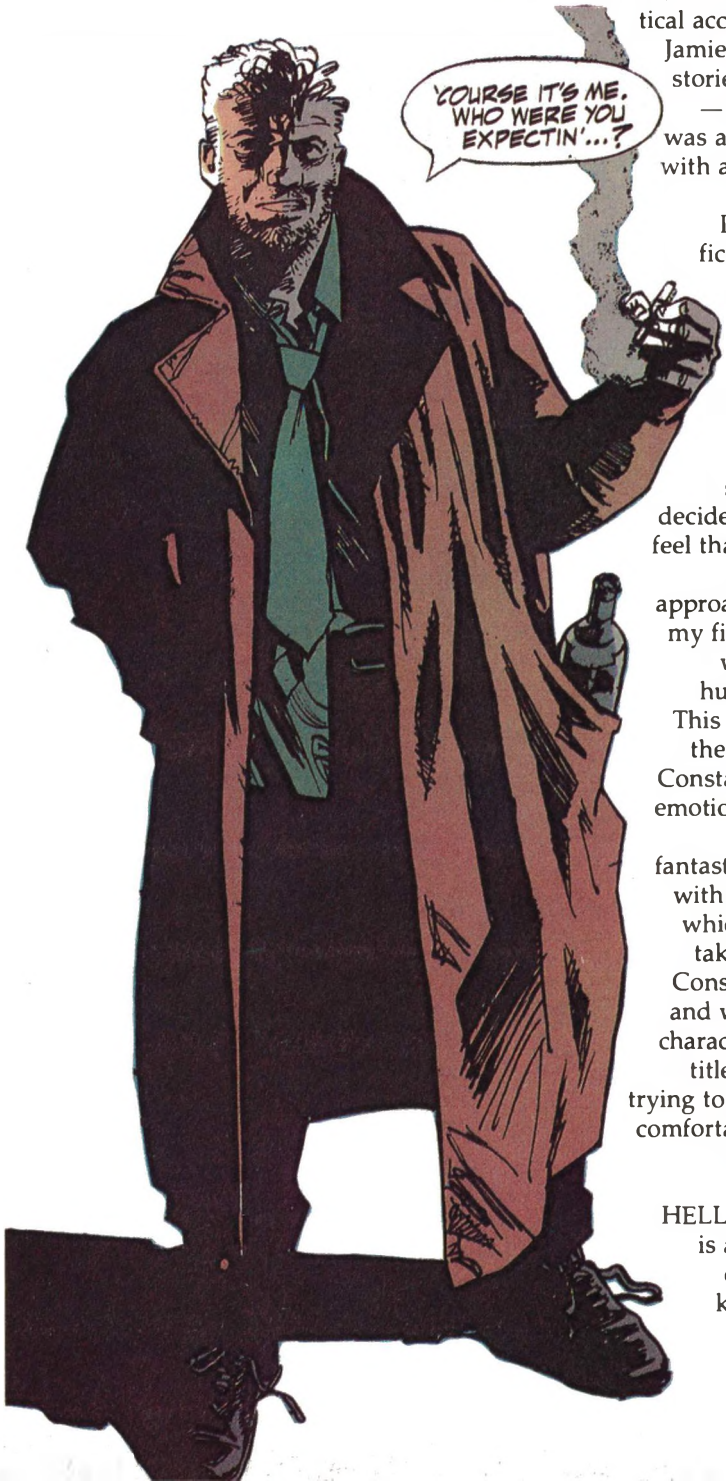
All apologies, I slid forward towards her, castors squealing.

"No, Nick! No!" she managed to scream.

Jamie Delano deals in horrors. But his are not ordinary horrors. From demon yuppies and government-backed grand conspiracies to a pensioner-cum-serial killer, Jamie's horrors are off-beat and bizarre according to Michael Bonner.

CUT DEAD

Rich in ideas and lavish in style, part of the success of Jamie's writing is this deliberately awkward and uncompromising move away from conventional horror that he has adopted. Along with SHADE, THE CHANGING MAN and SANDMAN, Jamie's HELLBLAZER title for DC comics is one of the most highly regarded products on the market today. Well into its second year, and with sales at a healthy average of 45,000 per issue, HELLBLAZER has given this former librarian/taxi driver/chainsaw wielder from Northampton a great deal of critical acclaim.



Jamie's writing career began in 1983 with the NIGHT RAVEN text stories and CAPTAIN BRITAIN and DOCTOR WHO comic strips — all for Marvel Comics' operation in the UK. NIGHT RAVEN was a mordant, sinister, masked vigilante figure who was imbued with all the better aspects of the likes of Spillane and Chandler — "I suppose NIGHT RAVEN was very much of a pastiche. I inherited it from Alan Moore, and he'd presented it as pulp fiction. I had a very nice time writing that sort of style of story and setting it in a contemporary environment."

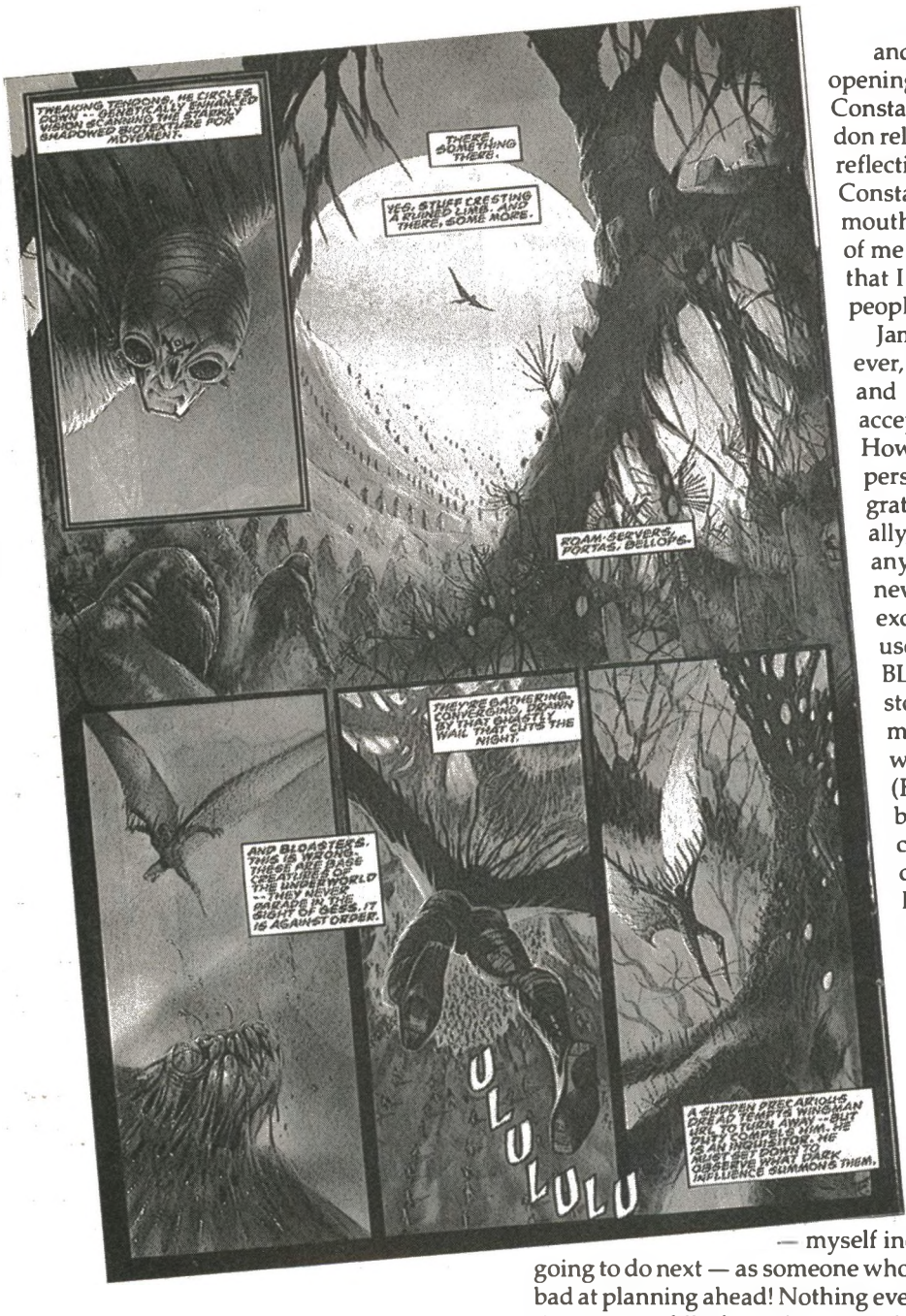
Jamie's lack of exposure to comics in his youth meant that when it came to writing CAPTAIN BRITAIN (again, taken over from Alan Moore) his approach was fresh and objective. "I hardly read any comics and I certainly wasn't a fan. Alan Moore started introducing me to them in the 70's, but they were mostly underground stuff — I certainly never saw any Marvel or DC superhero titles. I suppose I'd always decided I was a writer and, once I'd had a go at comics, I began to feel that they had distinct possibilities as a story-telling medium in which you could communicate. The only way I could find to approach CAPTAIN BRITAIN was from not having the tradition at my finger tips. I wasn't subject to things like continuity because I wasn't really immersed in them. What interested me was the human angle — the drama of human emotional circumstance."

This is also true of HELLBLAZER where the internal narrative of the strip is provided by the central character, John Constantine. Constantine's narrative works primarily as a mirror of the readers' emotional response, where he feels and experiences for the reader.

At the start of the series the villains were decidedly more fantastical creations, but recently Jamie has imbued HELLBLAZER with more human horrors — psychological and mental terrors — which provide immediate identification points for a reader. "You take the material as you find it. Until the HELLBLAZER series, Constantine had been a supporting character in SWAMP THING and when I came to him I very much had to feel my way into the character. At the same time I was trying to write a 24 page regular title which I hadn't done before. I was telling horror stories and trying to fit in the tradition of horror stories in comics. As I got more comfortable with the process of writing the comic and the character, the character started to take over the story and I could relax with that."

HELLBLAZER is a lush, pulchritude of elegance that shows Jamie is a writer of calibre. His self-confessed love for novels and his exceptional, literary approach to HELLBLZAER is one of the keys to the series' success. Like his friend and contemporary, SANDMAN writer Neil Gaiman, Jamie loves language

COME ON. DON'T HOLD BACK.
YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO. YOU KNOW YOU'RE FASCINATED.
BUT HE'S OBVIOUSLY IN TROUBLE--AND WE'RE HIS FRIENDS.
IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT. I'LL LOOK AFTER YOU.
TRUST ME.
NO, MERCURY, I DON'T WANT...
TOO LATE. YOU'RE COMMITTED NOW.
COWARD.
DON'T HIDE IT FROM ME. SOMETHING ABOUT FATHERS... AND A GUN..?
YOU BASTARD-- LET ME SEE.
NO... I'M SORRY... I CAN'T.
SICK AS A DOG... GOT TO LIE DOWN...
JOHN... MERC...?
LET HIM GO, MARJ.


TWEAKING TENDONS, HE CIRCLES, DOWN -- GENETICALLY ENHANCED VISION SCANNING THE STARKLY SHADOWED SCULPTURE FOR MOVEMENT.
THERE, SOMETHING THERE.
YES. STUFF CRESTING A RUINED LIMB. AND THERE, SOME MORE.
ROAM. SERVERS. PORTAS. BELLOPS.
THEY'RE GATHERING. CONVERGING. DRAWN BY THAT GHASTLY WAIL THAT CUTS THE NIGHT.
AND BLOASTERS. THIS IS WRONG. THESE ARE BASE CREATURES OF THE UNDERWORLD -- THEY NEVER PARADE IN THE SIGHT OF GODS. IT IS AGAINST ORDER.
ULULULU
A SUDDEN PRECARIOUS DREAD TEMPTS WINGMAN LUC TO TURN AWAY -- BUT DUTY COMPELS HIM. HE IS AN INQUISITOR. HE MUST PUT DOWN TO OBSERVE WHAT DARK INFLUENCE SUMMONS THEM.

and words. In HELLBLZAER #10, for instance, the opening sequences are written in blank verse. As a result, Constantine transcends his role as a dodgy, South London relic from the 70's and is transformed into an erudite reflection of Jamie himself. "You write a character like Constantine and to some extent he becomes your mouthpiece. Because I animate him there are elements of me in him and I have affection for those parts of him that I can recognise. Similarly, there are parts of other people and characters that I've welded into him."

Jamie sees horror as "an emotion. Like love." However, there are limits to the lengths one can take horror and still retain commercial properties which are acceptable to a mainstream audience. "A lot of it is How and Why. The difficulty there is that it's a very personal judgment — is something too much? is it gratuitous? is it done for the wrong reason? Personally, I hope I'd never do anything gratuitously or for any reason other than the story demands it. DC have never come close to baulking at anything I've done — except over copyright for the fictional characters I used in the 'Larger Than Life' episode of HELLBLAZER, which ironically wasn't really a horror story. To some extent, at least, unless the fundamentalists are banging on the door no one's going to worry too much. I'm not saying Karen Berger (HELLBLAZER editor) has no morals or integrity, but she's prepared to see where it will go before commenting or passing a judgment. When it comes down to it I trust my judgment and I trust Karen's judgment."

'Larger Than Life' — a prologue of sorts to the recently completed serial killer story-line 'The Family Man' — was a quirky, curious story which featured Sherlock Holmes, Hamlet, Bill Sykes, Winnie-The-Pooh and a whole host of other fictional characters. "Every so often I like to do something like that. I get locked into an obsessional pattern with stories and it's good to break that up with one-offs. If you look at the whole series there are three or four of them. They break the pace up and give everyone a breather — myself included. They give me time tot work out what I'm going to do next — as someone who's supposed to be writing a series, I'm remarkably bad at planning ahead! Nothing ever goes the way it's supposed to, and it just ends up diverging wildly from the original plan. I have the sense of what I want to do and I have the theme that sparked the idea off, and when it comes down to it it's often what the characters say when we first encounter them that affects the story. It gets tense sometimes — when you're lying on a couch in a semi-darkened room knowing the story's in your head — and then suddenly you get the day when you start to write the story and it all pours out at once. I get a kick-start in a certain direction and I just follow that through. "All art — and comics are no lesser a form of it — picks up on emotions and situations. As a writer you act as a lens to some extent — you see something and you want to describe how it feel to you. Basically, you then try and re-present it. That's the way I feel about any form of writing, whatever it is. If you're doing it properly, you give it some reality — you see something write about it, give it to someone to read and hope that they share your emotional response. Reacting in that way to the world is probably why I can't write superheroes — they don't seem to fit in. I'm going to be writing a MAN-BAT series for DC shortly, to be illustrated by John Bolton, and the thing that intrigues me about MAN-BAT is what Cronenberg said he wanted to do with THE FLY — which was to get into the politics of being a fly. I want to get into the politics of being a bat."

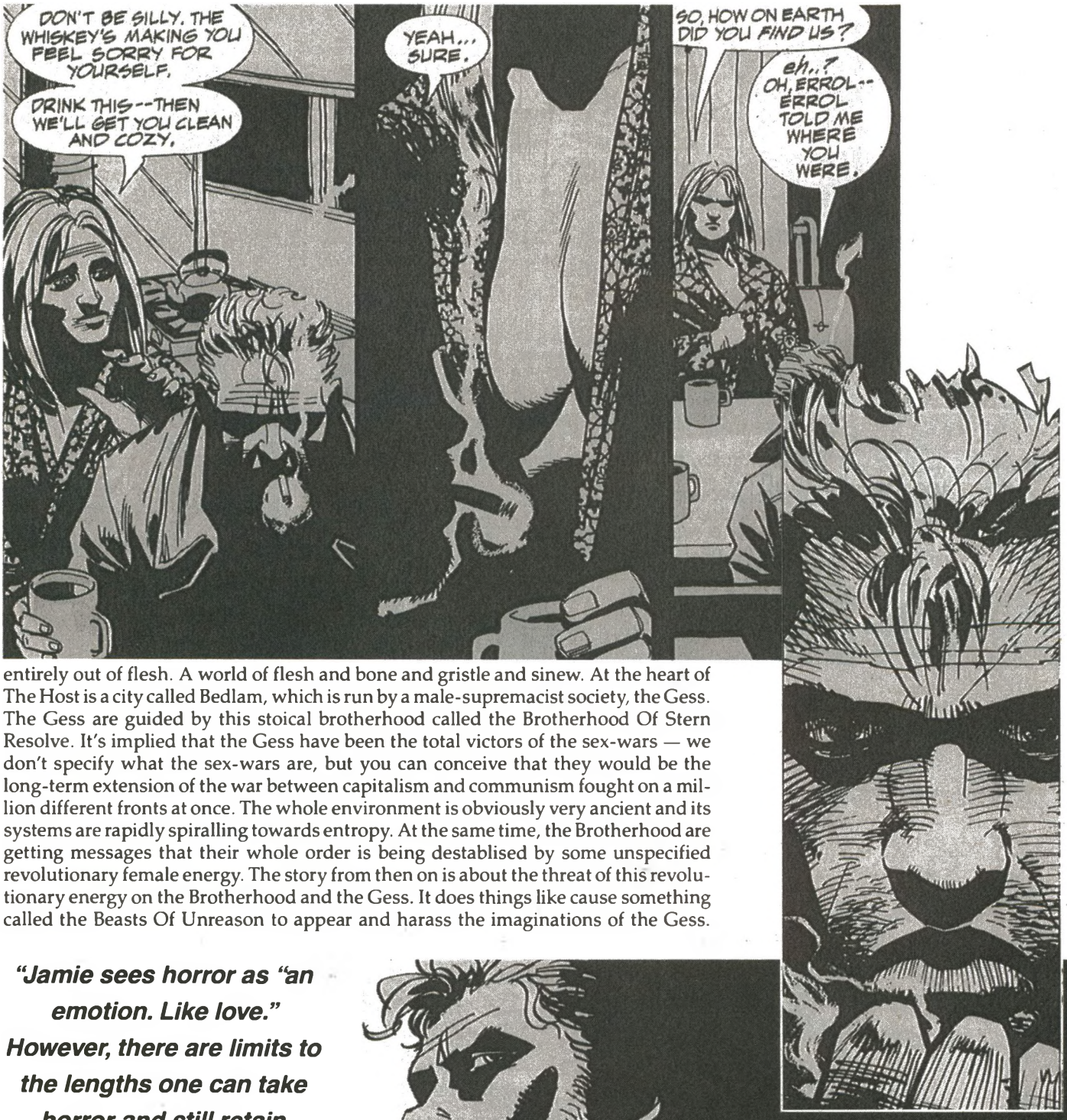
"At the start of the series the villains were decidedly more fantastical creations, but recently Jamie has imbued HELLBLAZER with more human horrors — psychological and mental terrors — which provide immediate identification points for a reader."

Comics are just another form of literature and, quite naturally, many writers want to expand into other aspects of the medium. Indeed, some already have: Grant Morrison, writer of DC's ARKHAM ASYLUM and DOOM PATROL, had critical success with his first play — RED KING RISING — which was performed as last year's prestigious Edinburgh Festival; Neil Gaiman has written several books; Frank Miller, the

man behind THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, wrote the screenplay for ROBOCOP 2. "For myself, I do have an unshakeable yen to write a novel. Unfortunately, I think that to some extent the novel is rapidly going to become defunct, but I still want to do one anyway. As much as anything else, I just want to do it to prove to myself that I can, simply because it's a medium I have a lot of respect for. I don't know about films or television. If someone said they'd pay me to just write a plot and a scenario, then maybe I'd be interested but I think there's far too much heartache involved."

Though any forays into the world of the novel seem destined to future days, Jamie has a new title for DC. Illustrated by KILLING JOKE/WATCHMEN colourist, John Higgins, WORLD WITHOUT END is a limited series in DC's new Pristine format. "It's a horror fantasy melodrama. It's set on a world called The Host that is grown entirely out of flesh. A world of flesh and bone and gristle and sinew. At the heart of The Host is a city called Bedlam, which is run by a male-supremacist society, the Gess. The Gess are guided by this stoical brotherhood called the Brotherhood Of Stern Resolve. It's implied that the Gess have been the total victors of the sex-wars — we don't specify what the sex-wars are, but you can conceive that they would be the long-term extension of the war between capitalism and communism fought on a million different fronts at once. The whole environment is obviously very ancient and its systems are rapidly spiralling towards entropy. At the same time, the Brotherhood are getting messages that their whole order is being destablised by some unspecified revolutionary female energy. The story from then on is about the threat of this revolutionary energy on the Brotherhood and the Gess. It does things like cause something called the Beasts Of Unreason to appear and harass the imaginations of the Gess.

"It's a horror fantasy melodrama. It's set on a world called The Host that is grown entirely out of flesh. A world of flesh and bone and gristle and sinew."


DON'T BE SILLY. THE WHISKEY'S MAKING YOU FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF.
DRINK THIS--THEN WE'LL GET YOU CLEAN AND COZY.
YEAH... SURE.
SO, HOW ON EARTH DID YOU FIND US?
eh..? OH, ERROL-- ERROL TOLD ME WHERE YOU WERE.

"Jamie sees horror as "an emotion. Like love." However, there are limits to the lengths one can take horror and still retain commercial properties which are acceptable to a mainstream audience."

"He's a terribly violent misogynist, really. He discovers this female enclave society and . . . well, it's like a pretty outrageous sci-fi Punch and Judy show, I suppose. It's got scenes of ghastly violence and corrupt sexuality which are pushed to almost ridiculous extremes. Basically, you've got to have something of a sense of humour to read it."

They're provoked into sending this genetic commando, called Brother Bones, who is made up from a genetic stock that's kept from millennia to millennia until it's needed. He's a terribly violent misogynist, really. He discovers this female enclave society and . . . well, it's like a pretty outrageous sci-fi Punch and Judy show, I suppose. It's got scenes of ghastly violence and corrupt sexuality which are pushed to almost ridiculous extremes. Basically, you've got to have something of a sense of humour to read it. There's an underlying theme of the balance of the sexes, and the balance of individuals as sexual beings at one with each other, and also the balance of sexuality between male and female within each individual. It's all thrown into a pretty potent witches brew that's been beautifully painted by John Higgins. He's put a tremendous amount of work into it — it's the first time he's really been allowed to let himself go and it really is absolutely splendid. It was originally conceived some time ago for a package Dave Lloyd (NIGHT RAVEN/V FOR VENDETTA artist) was putting together for IPC Magazines. After John's work on KILLING JOKE and WATCHMEN, DC asked us to try and come up with something together and WORLD WITHOUT END fitted the bill. It's spent a long time coming for a variety of reasons, but that extra time has given me the opportunity to go back and re-write and polish some of it, and also have given John the time to do an excellent job on the art."

Jamie is leaving HELLBLAZER with issue #40, but his presence will still be felt in the comics' world as he plans to return to NIGHT RAVEN with David Lloyd for a new series which will be serialised in Marvel UK's STRIP title. Along with NIGHT RAVEN, WORLD WITHOUT END and MAN-BAT Jamie will reach a crossroads in his career. But, judging by his previous work, whichever road he travels down I'm sure it will be just as dark and just as deadly . . .

THERE WILL BE BANDITS--SAVAGE ANIMALS. IT'S BAD OUTSIDE.
I'VE BEEN OUTSIDE ALL MY LIFE. I'LL MANAGE.
WHERE WILL YOU GO?
TO THE COAST, I THINK. I HEAR IT'S MUCH NEARER THAN IT USED TO BE.
GOODBYE.
GOOD LUCK...
PEACE GO WITH YOU.
AHH, SHUT UP,--YOU SANCTIMONIOUS BUNCH OF

"... the Earth hath skin, and the skin hath diseases. One of these ... is called man."
—nietzsche

WORLD WITHOUT E·N·D

The Ultimate Man has nothing to fear...
...except the Ultimate Woman.

Turn the page for an advance look at scenes from issue #1.

You'll get a glimpse of Jamie Delano's outrageous melodrama of the sex wars; a hint of John Higgins' rich and potent paintings. The extended page count and glossy, heavier stock of WORLD WITHOUT END's Special Format will provide the rest, in all of its sumptuous detail.

Six Issues
Beginning in October
Suggested for Mature Readers

© 1990 Jamie Delano and John Higgins ® 1M DC Comics Inc.

JACK IN THE BOX

Jason Oldroyd calls his story 'fairly deep'. That's okay, we can take it. Just take the time to think about it as well as reading it — you'll need it.

She was truly beautiful: the most radiant creature to ever grace his presence. The first time he laid eyes on her, he knew he had to have her. But the most amazing thing was, she wanted him too. Of course being surrounded by beautiful women was nothing new to him; he was rich. They swarmed to him like humming birds to abundant nectar. But she didn't want his money; no, she was already prosperous. In fact she was far wealthier than he, but he wouldn't hold this against her.

"More champagne, Melanie?"

"No thank's Jack. I've already had far too much. Are you being naughty and trying to get me tipsy."

He tried to hide his embarrassment, averting her glittering gaze, but he already felt a hot blush spreading across his cheeks.

She laughed: her delicate glee not humiliating, rather reassuring and instantly set him at ease.

"You know, you're so innocent and not afraid to show your feelings — I like that." She squeezed his hand tightly. "Come on. Let's go for a walk. The night air is so refreshing when it rolls in off the sea."

He opened the balcony door and they descended onto the beach. He held her close, feeling the warmth of her body against the cold night air. The gentle sea breeze blew her lavish hair across his face, leaving a titillating trace of her scent teasing at his olfactories. Playfully she broke away, kicking off her shoes and dashed along the sea's edge. Her feet danced in and out of the white horses with an almost magical quality, sending the fluorescent spray circling in glistening beads of light. She stopped after a short way, turning to face him.

"Come on Jack. I feel so young, almost like a teenager again. Run with me. Try and catch me. That is, if you still can." She laughed with girlish delight and continued to skip at the waters edge.

My God! Is this really happening? It's almost like a dream come true. He pinched himself. Yes it was real enough, and suddenly he felt reckless: yes — somehow younger again. If his business advisers — with their power dressing suits — could see him now, they'd probably doubt his ability to head the company; in fact they 'd probably say he'd lost his marbles. He could hear them now: "Poor man! But you know how it is when they reach that difficult age. They suddenly get these strange urges to prove themselves."

But right now, he didn't care what anyone thought. This moment was priceless and he was going to relish every second of it. "Come on Jack." Boy. This was it. It didn't get any better. "Coming."

He fought to remove his footwear, leaving one sock dangling on the end of his toes. Then he burst along the beach to catch her, his legs feeling strong and alive below him, the wind roaring in his ears. She turned, seeing him gaining fast and a squeak of delight escaped her excitement. He reached out to catch her, but she was too quick: her deft light frame dodging easily from his grasp. She giggled, pleased with her speed and dexterity, as he fumbled clumsily to little avail.

"You'll have to do better than that." She teased. He smiled coyly and gestured defeat. She approached with a triumphant grin stamped across her face and that's when he grabbed her. "You beast! You cheated!"

"I didn't think there were any rules?"

She laughed. "No? Well you said it." With a lightening blur, she brought her leg around behind his knee: pushing his body beyond its centre of gravity. He fell with little grace: his arms flailing wildly for support. He caught hold of her wrist as he went, bringing her down on top of him. She screamed in surprise and swore at him in fun. "Where did you learn that." He asked, gasping for breath. "A girl has to be able to protect herself you know." "It's me that should be protected!" "Oh really! You're such a baby." She paused for a lingering moment. "But I do love you so."

Her hair cascaded down onto his face, itching at his cheeks and ears. The moonlight glistened on her lips and the intimate heat of her breath fell onto his mouth.

They kissed. It was heaven.

He lay mesmerised by her delicate touch and gazed into those deep blue pools. "I want you Jack." She gasped finally. He could already feel the tell tale heat twinging in his gut as his libido went into overdrive. Then the strangest thing happened: he felt

like he was being drawn forwards, downwards. Her pupils were expanding, twisting, growing into a huge whirlpool of darkness: so black it made the night sky seem pale in comparison. Then he was falling: down, dark, hollow. He could hear her faint voice disappearing behind him. "Jack? Jack? Are you alright? Jack ....."

Time seemed to pass with no measurable unit. It was so dark. So quiet. So unnaturally quiet. No tell tale hush of white noise. Everything seemed somehow slow: dampened. Then he opened his eyes. Funny, as he hadn't realised they were shut. In fact to be honest, he didn't have eyes, not physical eyes anyhow. More like his mind's eye: a dream maybe, or a nightmare.

He was floating up in the corner of a dark room, feeling like some weird security camera fitted with one of those wide angle lenses, which twist and contort everything into goldfish bowl dimensions. It took a few minutes to get the hang of things; suddenly realising you can fly is quite a shock. All he had to do, was sort of think his way around. At first, he wondered if he was actually at the wheel, as he kind of knew where he was going before he got there — fine time to get deja vu. But he soon mastered the basic skills of mental teleportation.

The room was vast, more like a factory floor. At least this was his first impression. Below was machinery, the likes of which eluded all comprehension. There seemed to be no production and no workers, in fact the room seemed void of life. What the hell was this? Where the hell . . .

No! I couldn't be. There were no demons in red jump suits with matching three pronged forks. But then you had to move with the times. He drifted down to the machinery. It was bleak; very gothic. Wires and dividers writhed across its surface like snakes in a mating frenzy, and every now and again there was a break, from which emitted a light so intense it seemed to ignite the very air. As he drew closer, he saw it was pulsing — more throbbing. Alive.

Instantly his head was filled with words, hundreds, thousands, millions of mouths all wanting to speak at once. Some shouting, some whispering. Different languages, dialects, sexes; his head felt almost at the brink of bursting. That is, if he still had a head. Whatever. It hurt — bad. With a subconscious reaction, he flinched back. The words immediately eased, but still he could not distinguish between them. It was a sea of confusion; a nightmare party, where everyone talked and no-one listened.

And then he saw them: all those poor wretches, trapped within that hellish device like hens in a battery farm. They were each divided off into cubicles — their own private portion of hell — and the machine invaded their wasted bodies with all manners of probes and feelers. He now saw that the hot white light danced on each of their faces, flickering and flashing like a disconnected cathode ray. Their faces twitched and twisted into false expressions of mirth, laughter, sadness and sometimes sheer terror. It was like watching some automated mime trainer. Now he realised the source of the words, as their mouths babbled mindlessly to their mechanised captor. But these words weren't born on the air. No, these words were too deep; they all screamed inside the very roots of his mind. All that is, except one: an old man. He lay still and fixed on his face was an ecstatic grin so false, it seemed disturbing. He appeared to be sleeping peacefully; too peacefully.

There was something about him. Something that made Jack suddenly feel hollow, insignificant and helpless. Revolted by the scene he floated back to the ceiling, which had somehow lost its solid stake in reality; for now he moved beyond it, into the dark acid sky. The ground rolled below him, sour, drugged by the concrete and steel growth, that was once called progress. Everything a mix of greys, so tired by its own existence that hope was a forgotten dream. Faces no longer looked to the sky for warmth and comfort, for the sun had long since lost its battle to the cruel caustic clouds, and this world was condemned to a life of intermittent shadow. The jewel — in a desert of sterility — was finally dulled.

Was this hell? Or maybe the apocalypse? If this was some vision of the future — perhaps even a warning — then what could he do about it? Why him? He was only one man. He couldn't just wave a magic wand and make it all better.

The broken land ended, as the planes — pitted with the seeping sores of erosion — finally dipped their toes into a black, stinking, sea. There were no longer any boats. There were no longer any fish. Not here.

It was all too much. He wanted out: away from this overcrowded hell of lost humanity, away to a place where he could once again feel the wind — warmed gently by the sun — playing on his face. He needed to hear laughter again. Not like that in the man factories, but real laughter, genuine glee. To hear children contented as they play.

He was rising now. Accelerating, pulling away through the stinging clouds, away into the hush of space. Ahead the sun opened to greet him. Its life giving warmth wrapping him in its fiery cloak. But the flames did not burn. No! He was beyond physical bounds. At last: he was free.

"Was this hell? Or maybe the apocalypse? If this was some vision of the future — perhaps even a warning — then what could he do about it? Why him? He was only one man."

". . . Jack? Oh Jack I was so worried about you." The light which was once Sol's intense nuclear engine, suddenly mellowed to a faint yellow electric glow.

"Uhhh."

Things were coming into focus, a face, blurred, but definitely human and that pricking sensation of hair on his face, familiar, with a delicate essence of rose. "Melanie? Oh God! I feel awful."

"Don't worry. I'm going to phone the doctor."

"No!" He sat up sharp causing the room to swirl in his drowsyjview. "There's no need — really. I'm fine now." She lent forward, pushing him back onto the bed.

"Don't be silly: you fainted. I had to drag you back. It could be something serious."

"No. No. Just too much champagne, and all that running: I'm not used to it. I'm in pretty bad shape these days." She fixed him with such a probing glance, that he wondered if she could read his very thoughts. There was this flashing vision of her grilling him with a dry lance of light: an interrogation room; probably in the dungeons of some long forgotten castle. He was totally naked, covered in sweat and strapped — at her mercy — to a chair. She paced before him in black latex boots, fixed right up to her thighs. Boy! His fantasies were never tame.

He smiled with that honest sugar sweet look he'd perfected so well and her gaze softened. She was a hard business woman: feared by many men. But to him, she was just sweet, tender, little Melanie. "Oh Jack. I was so worried."

He reached up and brushed some sand from her cheeks. She kissed his hand. He'd totally forgotten about that nightmare, premonition or what ever. All he saw now was his beautiful girl.

"Listen. I'll go and see the doctor in the morning." He lied. Knowing very well that he'd just make another excuse, until the whole fiasco was forgotten. "O.K. On one condition — you let me nurse you tonight." Well, he wasn't going to argue with that. He moved forward and they kissed. An uncomfortable shudder ran down his spine as he suddenly realised his pants were full of sand, right down to the crack of his arse. When Melanie said she'd dragged him home: she wasn't kidding. She'd excavated half the beach into his trousers.

He broke off, stood and shook once leg, watching the golden dust shower over his toes. "I think I could do with a bath."

Melanie giggled, and then giving him a knowing look, led him into the bathroom.

He awoke early in the morning with Melanie still snug in his arms. It was so warm and cosy as they lay together like two keys in a velvet purse. Everything was perfect: he'd met the woman of his dreams, they were content and deeply in love. He didn't want of anything. So why did he feel uneasy: jumpy as if there was so little time. Then he remembered the dream. It had been itching at the back of his mind — unsettled. Now for some reason it was floating to the surface of his consciousness. He could remember it in snaps, mostly the horrible ones, dark and bleak. He wanted to forget, to turn over and sleep peacefully, but it wouldn't rest, thrashing around the sea of his mind like a wounded fish.

He shifted his attention to Melanie, who slept gently against his chest. She was so soft, her gentle breaths somehow soothing. He kissed the back of her neck and snuggled up to her close.

Everything was fine. It was just that pessimistic feeling hejsometimes got: that he wasn't allowed to be happy. Murphy's law and all that shit. He closed his eyes and relished her delicious scent. This was truly heaven.

He coughed suddenly, violently. The smell was different, foul, disgusting. His eyes flew open to a scene of sheer revulsion. He was in a factory again, but unlike the previous one. The vast room was lit by blinding ultraviolet lamps. You could almost see the radiation burning down through the stagnant air. At the centre of the room a conveyor belt slowly coiled its way among various automatic implements. It partially resembled a car production line, except for two points: there were no cars and what replaced them was being dissembled.

The conveyor finally completed its gruesome trail into a huge vat, the final stage in a horrific recycling process. Protein enriched tubes fed off from this, down deep into a dark pit, to continue the cycle — closing the gap. But what was this? Some futuristic refuse dump? A meat recovery unit for some fast food company? No! This was the city morgue. The conveyor belts were lined with bodies: human bodies.

He wanted to look away: to close his eyes and return to his warm bed; but now that seemed so far away. His vision was drawn magnetically to the rumbling belt of death, to one body in particular: a man, old, unrecognisable, and yet somehow familiar. It was the man he'd seen before rigged up to that nightmare device in the other place.

What did it all mean? His mind was in turmoil. If this really was just a dream, why couldn't he wake up; like in all the other nightmares he so frequently experienced as a child. The old man was approaching a pod like device. As his head entered its ominous shadow, a small sensor lowered and peeled back his right eye lid. A laser probe

"The old man was approaching a pod like device. As his head entered its ominous shadow, a small sensor lowered and peeled back his right eyelid. A laser probe shot into his lifeless pupil causing Jack to reel as if it were burning into his own eye."

shot into the lifeless pupil causing Jack to reel as if it were burning into his own eye. Thankfully, the beam was only lasted an instant, but still there was a dull ache deep within his dream skull. What did it all mean? He was meant to witness that; feel the pain. But why? What link had he with this poor tortured soul. His question was to be answered, as his attention was drawn to a terminal which bled truth into the air in a shower of green holographic light:

RETINAL SCAN COMPLETED.

SUBJECT IDENTIFIED: REYNOLD JACK ASHLEY.
NO. CAM2890543

BORN: 04/02/2903
DECEASED: 20/07/3214

ENHANCEMENTS	SERIAL
1) BIO CARBON HEART	(TE46632)
2) OXYGEN REFINER	(LU54129 MRK.3)
3) SILICON FIBRE CARTILAGE	(RT88778)
4) SECONDARY CORTEX BOOSTER	(LB20000)
5) NANO BLOOD IMMUNITY ENHANCER	(BI98798 R POSITIVE)
6) GROWTH HORMONE DISPENSER	(HR86904)

CAUSE OF DEATH:- FAILURE OF ENHANCEMENT 1

FINAL AGE — 311 YEARS / 5 MONTHS / 16 DAYS —

CONCLUSION: AVERAGE.

RECOVER ENHANCEMENT: — 1 — 2 — 4 —

EXAMINE ENHANCEMENT 1: FIND POINT OF FAILURE
RECYCLE ENHANCEMENT — 2 — 4 -

ACCESS TO MEDICAL RECOVERY UNIT 5 GRANTED. PROGRAM LOADED AND CONFIRMED.

ACTION TERMINATED. CYCLE BEGIN.

Jacks confused mind grappled at the perplexity of the situation, and lost. That old man — who was over 300 years old — was meant to be him. How? Why? Was this a premonition? What was it all supposed to mean? It was stupid: the dates didn't even work out. According to the data, he was born in the thirtieth century. Heck, that was a thousand years from now. This was only .....

He fought hard, trying to recall the year, but his mind was turning over so fast, such trivial information eluded his grasp. Yeah — that's right. He was born in the twentieth century. It must be a dream. There was no other possible explanation.

As he fought to come to terms with his shattered mind, the old mans body was slowly entering an area marked with a large number 5. The belt suddenly jolted to a halt. Instantly long spindly arms drew down from an overhanging unit above him, giving the impression of a nightmare metallic spider. If Miss Muffet saw that sucker creeping up behind her, she'd probably think someone had doped her curds and whey with LSD.

With fast, but precise movements, the central arm positioned itself above his chest. The others moved menacingly to the flanks, as if poised to pounce. From the end of the central digit radiated a single flash of laser — moving from neck to abdomen in an blinding rush of liquid speed. The arm then receded obediently, as if beckoned by an invisible master; while the others realising it was their turn, lunged into the bloodless slit like ravenous beasts to a fetid kill.

Pain: Jack jarred upright in his bed, emptying his lungs with one almighty holler. Melanie — taken totally by surprise — fell onto the floor. "Shit! Jack! What the... "

He flew from the bed, backing into the corner of the room, where he squat with the sheets pulled firmly up to his chest. Melanie stood, and approached the shivering form. "Jack, darling? What is it."

His eyes were wide and innocent, almost withdrawn, roaming wildly about the room. She bent before him and gently stroked his forehead. He responded to her comfort relaxing the taught tendons in his neck, which were threatening to tear loose from the skin at any moment. She took hold of the sheet and tried to take it from his

"A door slid slowly open in a dark future. Two humanoid figures emerged into the hellish pit of machinery. Before them they pushed a trolley topped with a fresh body. They made their way down the winding aisle until they reached an empty cubicle."

"He was floating up in the corner of a dark room, feeling like some weird security camera fitted with one of those wide angle lenses, which twist and contort everything into goldfish bowl dimensions."

rapidly whitening knuckles. "No!" He cried, causing her to flinch back in surprise. "C..c..cut. I'm cut." "No honey." She soothed. "It's alright now. You must have been dreaming."

She gently lifted the sheet. "See." His eyes were those of a child: not wanting to look at the horrific abomination but still helplessly drawn to the terrible sight. The gaze landed on his heaving chest; the skin was unbroken. Abruptly he flung his arms around her and began to sob huge powerful tears. His entire body shuddered within her hold: totally lost to the ordeal. "Oh Melanie. I love you so much. I don't know what I'd do if you weren't here."

"Shhhhh." She rocked him like a big baby, and then brushed the tear stained hair from his eyes. "I'll always be here for you. I love you too — so, so much." She kissed his tight lips and there were tears in her eyes; tears of rapture and devotion. She took his hand and led him back to the bed, where they made love in the first warm rays of the early sun.

A delicious cool breeze blew in from the rolling surf as Jack lay basking in the mellow late afternoon rays. He filled his lungs with its rich tang, and now he truly knew the meaning of joy. This was a new man: born of a dream. His vision was changed. People and life took preference, rather than material lures. True beauty was in love, not in vision or value. The dream, even with all its horror and pain, had showed him that he was truly lucky. This was it: the big one — life. He was going to live it to the full and to hell with any pompous fart who tried to tell him otherwise. Of course he wasn't going to become self centred; not by far. He cared about this world, and those who lived within its fertile bounds. It was a jewel to be treasured for eternity, not to be exploited for quick gain. He now saw one of man's main faults: his fascination with knowledge and speed. Never satisfied: always seeking that lush green grass on the other side of the fence, little knowing of its saturation with artificial toxins and that the fertile ground from which it bursts forth, will be bled sterile in two seasons time. Knowledge is good, if man just takes time to think. It should not be sacrificed to short term profit, leaving our successors to clean up the mess. The world can cope with humanity, if it is allowed to recover. But it needs time. Can we spare it?

Maybe that's what it was all about. Maybe the dream was a warning after all: of things to come, where progress allows average life expectancy to be increased to some 300 years; but is it really life? And the price we pay — our world.

Melanie emerged from the cool darkness of the beach house, wearing what could only marginally be classed as a bikini. She lay beside him, pushing her way onto the sunbed. There might just be time, he thought. Maybe it isn't too late after all; not yet.

A door slid slowly open in a dark future. Two humanoid figures emerged into the hellish pit of machinery. Before them they pushed a trolley topped with a fresh body. They made their way down the winding aisle until they reached an empty cubicle. This is it. Get a firm grip: we don't want to drop another one do we. I know you're new here — it doesn't do to drop the clients."

A muffled laugh emanated from somewhere behind the featureless black visor.

"Just a minute." The new man turned to the cubicle wall and tapped wildly on a keypad. "This one's still active." "Oh no! Not another one. This happens now and again. You'll get used to it after a while. Now then — let's see what we've got here."

The second man approached the unit, flexed his expert fingers and began to type. The terminal screen blazed into life.

SUBJECT IDENTIFIED: REYNOLD JACK ASHLEY.
NO. CAM2890543

BORN: 04/02/2903
DECEASED: 20/07/3214

"I knew it — ghost in the machine. And hey, look at this." His fingers blurred again causing the screen to display an image of idyllic harmony. "He thinks he's in the twentieth century. Crikey! Will you look at that bird." The other man pulled his eyes from the screen. "But I thought these alternative reality gizmos were supposed to cut out at the point of death."

"Yeah. That's right, but you know what this state of the art stuff is like. So real, they don't know when they're gone. My theory is that the soul sometimes lingers in the circuitry, but try telling that to the technicians. As soon as you mention the word soul, they give you that far away look. On paper it shouldn't happen you see, and in our line of work it doesn't look good to start talking about the possibilities of after-life: it'd put us all out of a job. Still, in this sort of situation there's always the manual override." He inserted a key and lifted a small safety catch to reveal a switch marked: DANGER — RESET.

Somewhere in paradise, Jack suddenly felt cold. The wind was changing.

INDUSTRIAL GOTHIC

Stephen Laws, the quiet man of horror, is one of the least visible of the current British horror explosion. In fact, he hasn't given up the day job yet, despite increasing success with his fourth novel THE FRIGHTENERS. He talks with Brian J. Robb and Brigid Cherry.

Stephen Laws is as at interesting point of development as a writer. Not yet a professional — he still works as a recorder at his local council offices — but with four successful horror novels to his name he's no longer an amateur. His latest horror novel, THE FRIGHTENERS, has confirmed his status as the newest horror fiction success story.

A Newcastle lad, Laws has based his first three books, GHOST TRAIN, SPECTRE and THE WYRM, in or around his home town. Although not a trilogy there are links between them. With several demons arising from the North East of England to create their own hells on Earth, one would expect Newcastle to get a bad name from his writing. The locality, though, is a source for his strain of horror: "I'm a slum kid, I come from an industrial city: I'm creating a new gothic. Once upon a time it was draughty mansions and cobwebbed candelabras and a strange deformed woman playing the piano in the middle of the night. It's not that at all now, it's about back alleys, deserted factories and industrial estates."

Looking back on his upbringing, writing has been a passion with Laws from a very early age: "From the first time I started to write, I wanted to write stories. I don't know whether it's chemical or character — but when I should have been learning arithmetic or geography I was actually at the back of the class writing stories. I discovered books by myself with a little pushing from my father, who was a frustrated writer himself. Things like Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle and all the really old fashioned stuff was the thing that got me going."

Laws' first attempt at following his childhood ambition through was not a successful one. A TV comedy he'd written was accepted by the BBC, but failed to get produced as the cost was prohibitive. Laws returned to short story writing and won a local newspaper short story competition — a much needed boost to the young writer's flagging confidence. "I thought hang on, if people are enjoying what I've done maybe I could do something more."

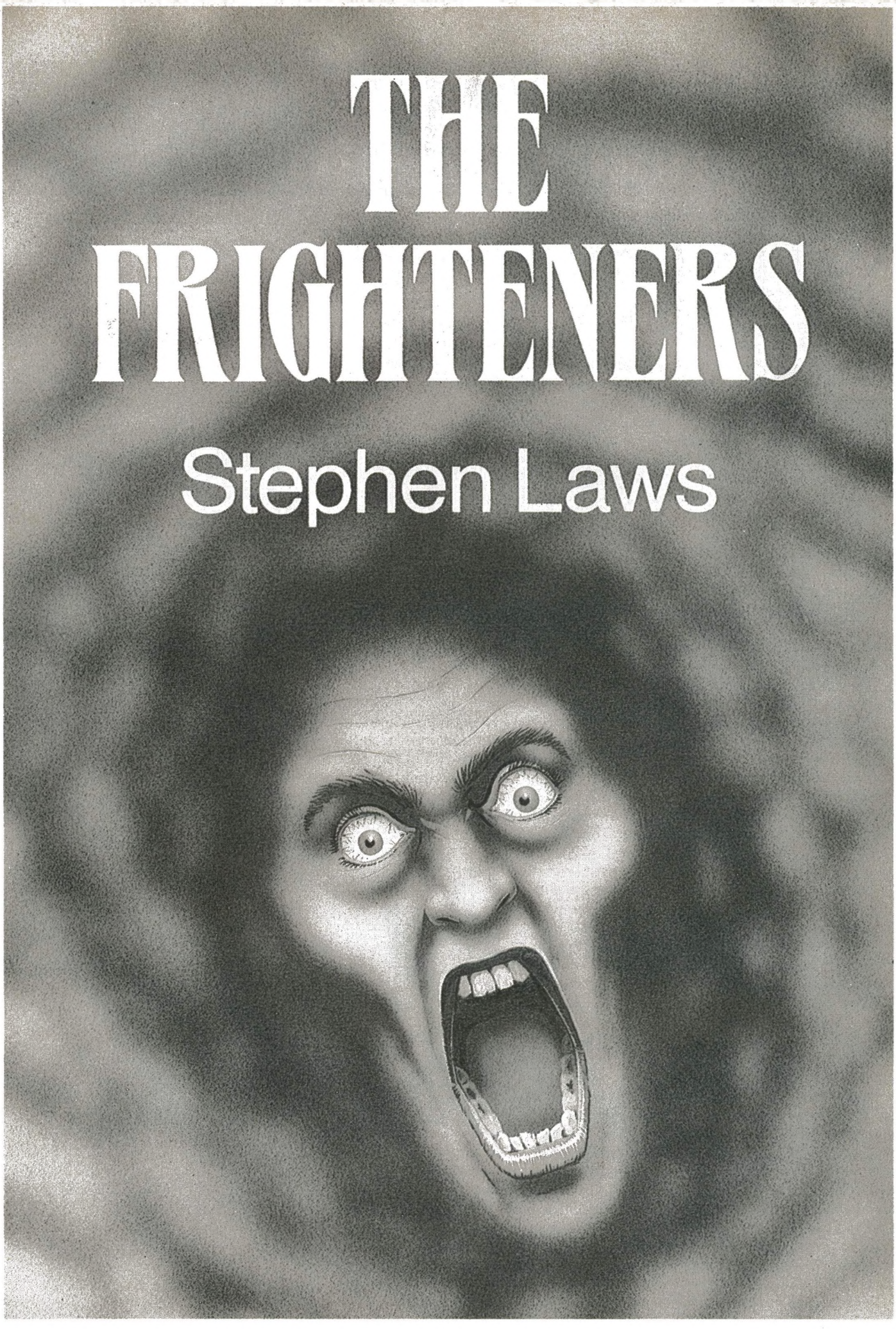
He decided to write a novel, but moreover a novel on a subject which he felt a particular affinity for: "I'd never actually thought about writing in a particular genre, especially not horror. In a funny way I still had this hangover from the early years that writing so called horror, which I hate as a phrase, was somehow wrong. There's something wrong with people who like it, it's not serious. But then, some of the best literature written is so called horror. It touches on all sorts of deep, underlying, subtle things. So I concentrated on writing a book that I would like to read and that was GHOST TRAIN."

At the time he was writing GHOST TRAIN the idea of having it published wasn't really paramount in Laws' mind: "All I wanted to do was to write what I would consider to be a good book that had I read it myself I would thoroughly enjoy. When I did get it done and I had this great thick manuscript, I thought this is a book and it could be published."

Laws' experience in getting published is not typical. He is the first to admit that he was very lucky. "I wrote a three page summary of the book, I left it on a cliffhanger as a bit of a tease, photocopied that and sent it off to about 20 publishers and then sat back and waited. Obviously, letters came back saying "No we're not interested", but the first one that said "Yes we like the idea of this" was Souvenir Press. I was stunned."

Stephen Laws is a very keen horror film fan and his own particular way of working is drawn from film. "I write an outline first and the way I write it is as if I were watching a film on screen. I write it in the present tense. I just say this is a film I'm watching in my head and this is what I see. So I write the outline and once the outline's done I then start work on the book. Obviously, you're writing a book, you're not writing a film. That's why characterisation is the single most important ingredient of these books, of all books. You've got to believe in the people before you believe in the supernatural things that happen to them."

Laws does associate with his main characters quite strongly: "I've done four books so far and each of the main characters is slightly tormented for one reason or another


THE
FRIGHTENERS
Stephen Laws

and they're all aspects of me. They aren't me personally but they are aspects of me. Mark Davis from GHOST TRAIN is an aspect of me, there is a strong element of me in Richard in SPECTRE and in THE WYRM there's a writer called Michael Lambton who is a bit of me too. I've probably been exorcising personal demons in these books to the stage where I don't have to do that any more."

Laws' second book allowed him to exploit his home ground to immense advantage as well as casting out those personal demons. He didn't start work on SPECTRE until after GHOST TRAIN was accepted for publication. Being a published writer had benefits all of its own. It actually affected the way he wrote SPECTRE, but not in the way one might expect. "I couldn't write any old crap and get away with it. I could write something that I feel very deeply about and I could really indulge myself. I could write about something that perhaps had it been the first book may not have attracted a publisher's attention. SPECTRE is set in Byker, where I'd lived. It's about a real cinema which existed until it was pulled down a couple of years ago; I spent my youth there. I was asthmatic as a kid so I spent all my time in the picture house not on the playing field. Writing SPECTRE got very intense for me, because I suddenly found myself playing around with things which should be best left alone. You know the old statement in FRANKENSTEIN: there are things that men are not meant to know. The second book became a little bit too personalised and that was a bit distressing sometimes."

"I'm a slum kid, I come from an industrial city: I'm creating a new gothic. Once upon a time it was draughty mansions and cobwebbed candelabras and a strange deformed woman playing the piano in the middle of the night. It's not that at all now, it's about back alleys, deserted factories and industrial estates."

It is odd that when Stephen Laws wrote GHOST TRAIN he wrote it to please himself, but when he wrote his second book he wrote it to please himself even more! Maybe he has always had a sub-conscious eye on the commercial market. Certainly he has been developing his writing skills and is the first to admit that he is still learning his craft. However, after his third novel, THE WYRM, he did think he had reached a watershed. "It sounds really grand to say it, but THE WYRM was finished off round a pool in Teneriffe. The fact of the matter was I had a deadline to meet and I had an outline of three chapters which were important ones. So I took advantage of having a holiday and while other people were sunbathing I finished the book. I thought that would be my final statement in the genre. I'd gone down every avenue that I wanted to. So I took a year's sabbatical. My particular fear is of not producing quality stuff and lapsing into a mechanical, genre based, exploitative kind of work. I'd rather not write than ever do that."

Laws is adamant that he will never write an exploitative book: "I could certainly write ATTACK OF THE KILLER SLUGS! No problem. 100,000 words on DEATH SLASH OF THE STALKER ZOMBIE! But I never ever want to get to that stage because I'm aware of the rules of the genre. We all know what works and what doesn't work and what the classics are. It's great fun to be able to be writing in a genre that you love a lot and you can do things with and hopefully maybe even extend a bit."

"All I wanted to do was to write what I would consider to be a good book that had I read it myself I would thoroughly enjoy. When I did get it done and I had this great thick manuscript, I thought this is a book and it could be published."

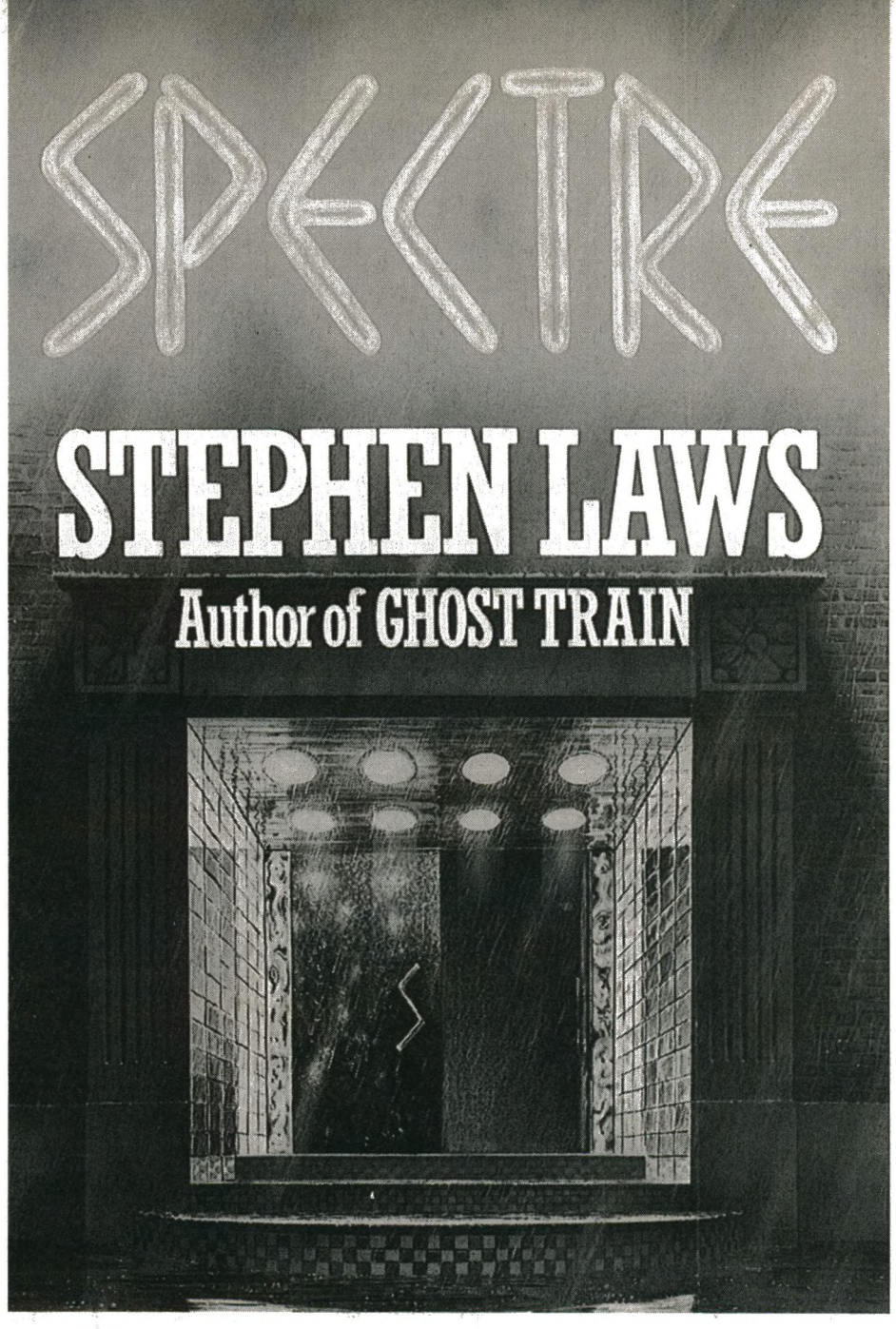
Returning to the demons that Laws feels he exorcised writing his first three novels, it is the childhood influences that are strong. These include the television programmes he saw as a child from behind the sofa, particularly QUATERMASS, and also by the Hammer films and trailers he managed to see at The Imperial Cinema (which features in SPECTRE) when young. He feels that one way of getting those elements that scared him out of his system is to develop them.

But why, apart from exorcising demons, does Laws write horror fiction? "Horror is a very important genre. It deals with the mind and it deals with what we fear. Two of the strongest motivators of human nature are love and fear, so it's a very important area to deal in. You can go as deep as you want to and it's still a mystery. Westerns, even science fiction or gangster thrillers, have certain limits, but if you're dealing with the horror genre there are no limits."

It is often not clear that this is the stance he is taking because his structures and conventions are very traditional ones. He explains: "It is often the subtext which is more important than the story itself. People are actually facing their own mental battles and exorcising their own personal demons. It's a question of inner mental things exploding out of people's brains into the outside world rather than the idea of mythical deities invading people. That's a structural device. I'm not interested in Azimuth or the Gorgon or the Wyrm. It's the people who are involved with that influence who are the most important things about it."

Laws has now decided that he will continue writing. After his year's sabbatical, his passionate feelings about horror fiction are re-emerging and he has ideas for new books. "Probably because I've been learning the craft as I've gone along, examining my relationships with people and material, I've had some fabulous ideas that appeal

"I could certainly write ATTACK OF THE KILLER SLUGS! No problem. 100,000 words on DEATH SLASH OF THE STALKER ZOMBIE!"



to me. Not necessarily that the readership is going to love, but things that have actually tickled my fancy."

Laws' newest novel was recently released in Britain. With THE FRIGHTENERS, Laws is mixing two of his favourite genres. "It's a kind of cross between GET CARTER and THE EXORCIST. Chew over that! It's a kind of gangster thing which I like a lot."

He is also writing a comedy novel on the sidelines as therapy when the horror gets too intense. It is a great safety release for him and also harps back to the kind of work he was doing when he wrote the comedy script for the BBC. He reckons that there is not a great deal of difference in terms of entertainment value between comedy and horror. "On one end of the scale you have a scream of laughter and on the other hand you have a scream of terror. We've all seen people howl with laughter. Basically people want to be entertained. A scream of fear or a scream of laughter is an expression of a satisfied customer."

So how does Stephen Laws see himself at present. Is his writing a hobby or a second job? Is he a local government officer? "It's not a hobby, no. It's a vocation, there's no doubt about it. It's something that's a passion now. At heart I'm a writer. I'm at present masquerading as a local government worker. One of these days I'll burst out of the chrysalis. I'd like to think in ten years time I'd be doing it full time and I'm not talking about holidays in Barbados every year, just enough to pay the bills, that'll do me fine. If I thought I could write books that I love for the rest of my life and just account for my responsibilities, that'll do me great."

And his philosophy on life? "You've just got to find your own way and find someone to love and be loved back and all that crap!"

"At heart I'm a writer. I'm at present masquerading as a local government worker. One of these days I'll burst out of the chrysalis."

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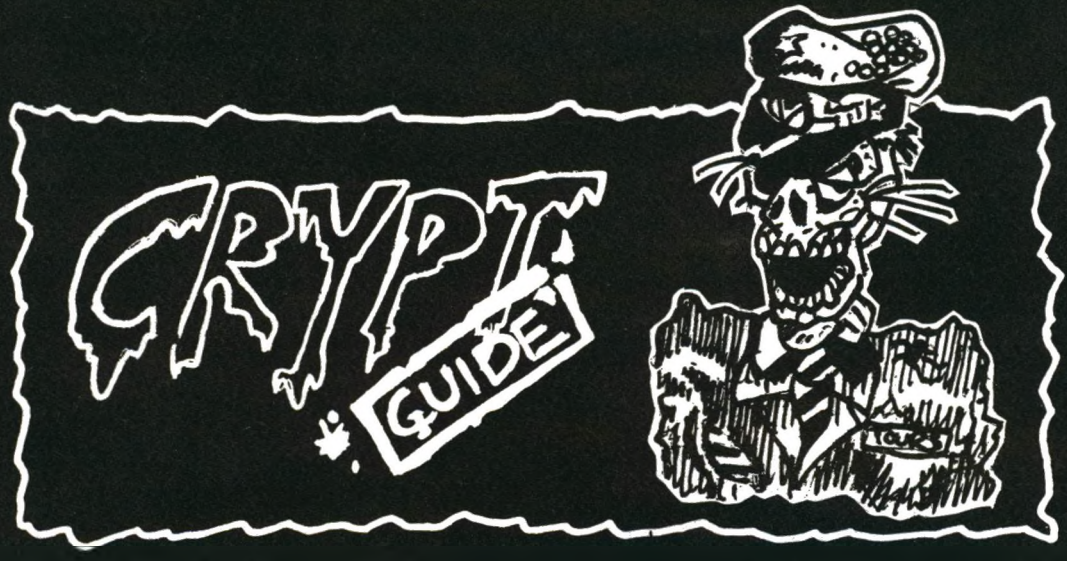

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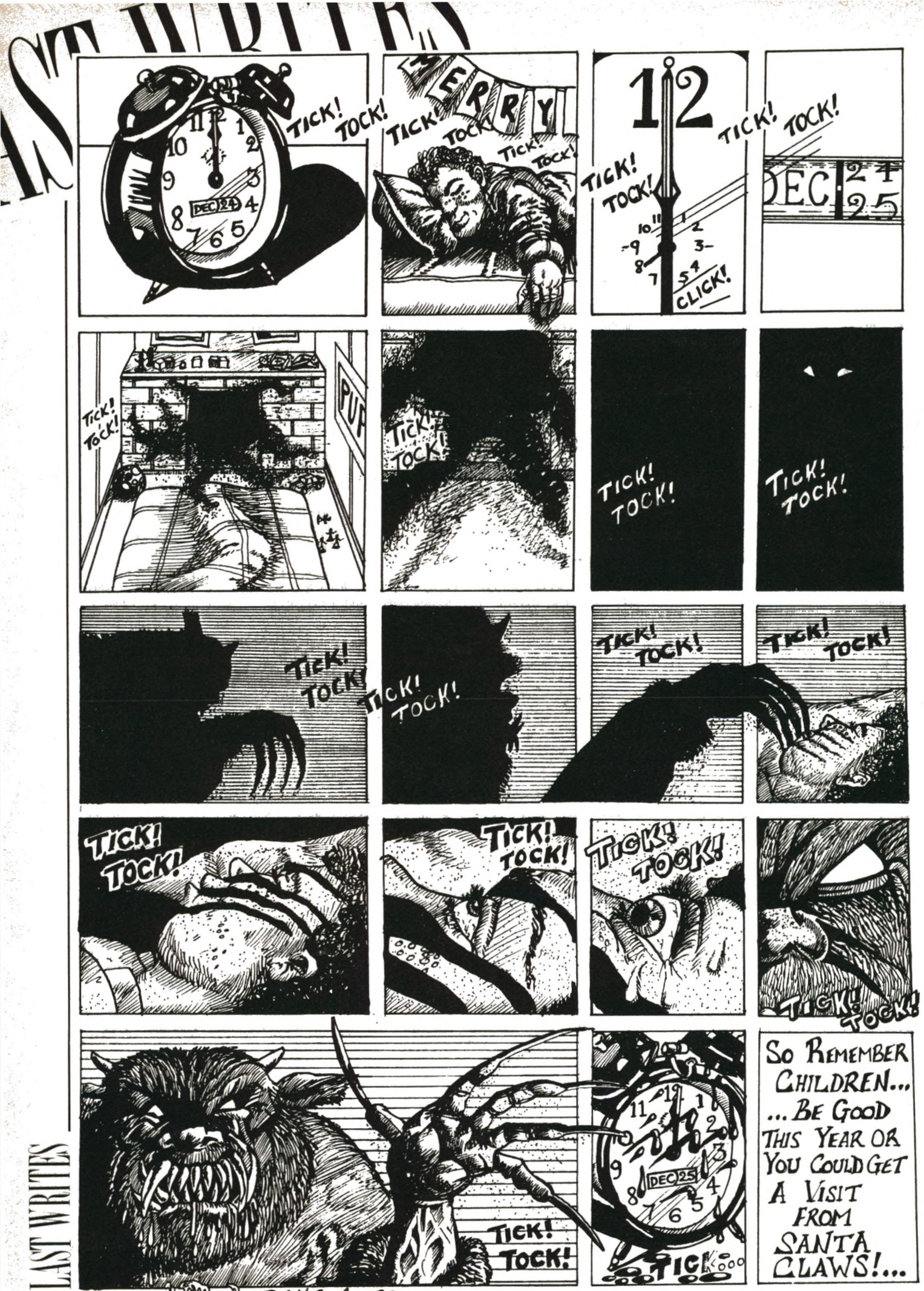
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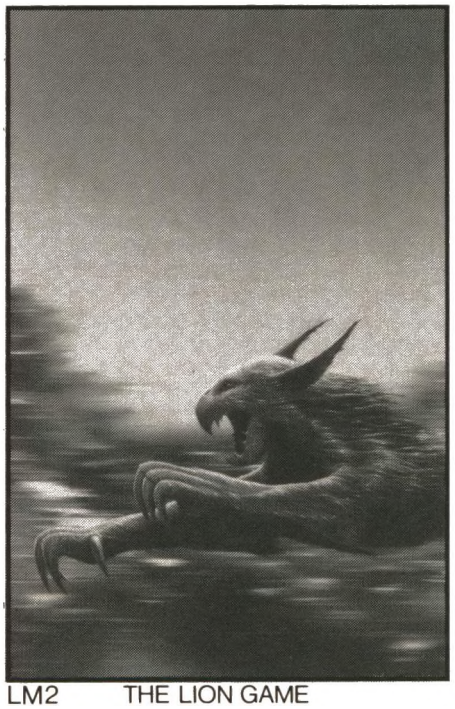

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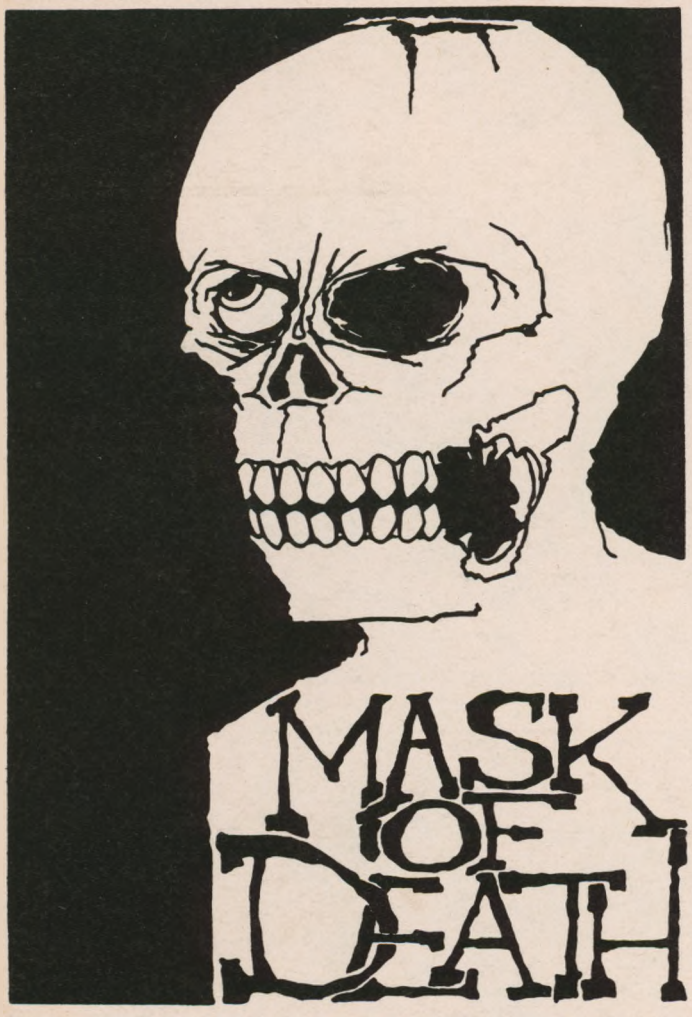
ZERRT SHIRTS

Proprietor: John Sketchley
TEL: (0724) 783913



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